

whooping crane *Grus Americana*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Gruiformes

Family: Gruidae

ILLINOIS STATUS federally endangered, native

FEATURES

The whooping crane is the tallest North American bird. Males, at about five feet tall, are larger than females. Adults are white except for black primary feathers on the wings and a bare red face and crown. The bill is dark olive-gray. The eyes are yellow, and the legs and feet are gray-black. Immature cranes are a cinnamon color that results in a mottled appearance as the white feathers grow.

BEHAVIORS

Whooping cranes are federally endangered and are very rare migrants in Illinois. Their historic breeding range once extended across the north-central United States and in the Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. A separate non-migratory breeding population occurred in southwestern Louisiana. By 1941 only 16 individuals were remaining in the single, natural migratory population of these birds. A decision was made to attempt to reintroduce populations of whooping cranes in other locations in their historic range. One of these populations is in Wisconsin. The intent was to establish a migratory flock that would summer and breed in central Wisconsin then migrate to and winter in west-central Florida. The birds were taught the migration route after being conditioned to follow costumed pilots in ultralight aircraft. The program has been successful, and approximately 90 whooping cranes now make the trip between Florida and Wisconsin annually. Some of these whooping cranes are seen in Illinois as they migrate. Updated information on this project is available online at <http://www.bringbackthecranes.org>.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

marshes; bottomland forests; peatlands; rivers and streams; swamps; lakes, ponds and reservoir

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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