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Operation Migration (OM) is a Canadian/U.S. non-profit organization founded in 1994 to fund research into aircraft-led migration. For many species the ability to migrate is a learned process and when the last bird is gone from an area, that route is lost forever. OM has developed a method for re-establishing these routes by teaching captive-reared birds to follow specially designed ultralight aircraft. OM has conducted several successful migration studies leading three species of birds; Canada Geese, Trumpeter Swans and Sandhill Cranes, to a pre-selected winter habitat.

Working persistently for the past 10 years, the OM team refined the training technique to apply to endangered Whooping cranes. OM conditioned birds for a preliminary study using sandhill cranes as research surrogates in 2000. On October 3, 2000 three ultralight pilots and a ground crew of nine, departed the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge; Destination—the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Florida; a migration that lasted 40-days, covering 1227 miles. The young cranes spent the winter in Florida until departing on February 25th, 2001. For more than sixty-days, the whereabouts of these cranes remained a mystery. Finally, on April 27th the OM crew, now stationed in Ontario, Canada at the OM headquarters, received word that 10 Sandhill cranes had been confirmed foraging on the grass-training strip in Wisconsin where they had taken their first flights with the ultralight aircraft.

This "dress rehearsal" was a harbinger of success in many ways. It allowed us to further refine the isolation and costume rearing protocols to ensure human avoidance, and it allowed us to identify and test the many stopover locations over the migration route. The stage is now set to save an endangered species and we invite you to follow the migration on our website at:

www.operationmigration.org

Daily updates will be posted on "In The Field"

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