

DOUGHTY, R.W. 1989. Return of the Whooping Crane. Pp. 192, 32 colour plates. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press. \$24.95. ISBN 0-292-79041-4.

The Whooping Crane *Grus americana* is one of the superstars of avian conservation. Ask any North American to recite the endangered species they know, the Whooping Crane will be on the list; and for good reason. Down to 21 wild birds in the mid 1950s, the free-living stock has been rebuilt to over 150, with more in captivity. The story of its return is a tale of successes owing to thoughtful planning, but also a tale of failures owing to lack of knowledge and human foibles. This book tells those tales too.

It is organized around the three major initiatives of the restoration process: preservation of the relict migratory flock that travels yearly from Canada to Texas; establishment of captive populations; and founding of new populations. Each is told chronologically, emphasizing the individual naturalists involved and the organizations that influenced them. Each is told critically, and in detail. At times the stories plod along seemingly relaying the discoveries as they were reported, down to the level of individual field trips. Yet field biologists will recognize, as viewers of television nature shows do not, that much of wildlife research is tedium. Tertiary, secondary, and primary sources of information are interchanged, and much of the meat of the book comes from unpublished notes and reports hidden in agency files.

From such inaccessible sources the author is able to weave his tale credibly of what it was like in the trenches, of who did what to whom, and at least hints of who thought otherwise. An example is the oft-asked question of the original population size. Robert Allen estimated 1300-1500. Richard Banks, in an unpublished report, was able to recalculate this figure at 500-700.

Conservation of ecosystems and conservation of populations are much in the news. Yet the Whooping Crane story is of the conservation of individuals. The author introduces us to the individual whoopers, to Crip, Tex, Canus, 75-1, Too Nice, and Miracles, whom we last see in full colour impaled on a wire fence. We also learn how the Dallas airport re-routed landings to allow a family to pass through its airspace.

In the final chapter the author has his say, thoughtfully evaluating hands-on versus hands-off conservation. The captive flock has not prospered; the newly formed population does not reproduce; the migratory flock is still shot at, disturbed, and knocked down by fences and guy-lines. His evaluations have led him to reflect not only on conservation measures, but their limits, and the apparent need for concerned people and agencies to do something rather than nothing. It is a tale well-told, and one that has meaning to those involved in the conservation of other species in other places.

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