



Whooping Cranes – The Incredible Journey

Materials:

- Set of migration cards
- Carts
- Video of cranes dancing on iPad
- Area signs (Northern Breeding Grounds/Wisconsin, Southern Wintering Grounds/Texas)

Preparation:

1. Gather materials listed above.
2. Cut out cards and sort by location.
3. Place cards on carts in auditorium.

Instructions:

1. Discuss with students the key terms from this activity – migration, breeding grounds and nonbreeding grounds. Share with the students that they will be taking on the role of whooping cranes for this activity.
2. To begin the game:
 - a. Each player must pick up one card at the wintering ground, each staging area, and the breeding ground.
 - b. Players must follow the directions written on the cards and return the cards to the pile before they continue their migrations. For example, a card from the breeding grounds may instruct its holder to take a person who has been labeled “dead” by another card and return him or her into the game as a young bird.
 - c. Any player who picks up a card indicating death of the bird must drop out of the game and stand along the sidelines until there is an opportunity to rejoin the game.
3. As the players run to the other side of the playing field, they must stop at each of the staging areas to refuel (unless otherwise instructed). They collect one card at each staging area and follow the directions on the card.
4. Players must make four complete migrations (from south to north and back to south). Each migration (in one direction) will begin with a signal from the teacher.
5. Plot the survival rate of each migration. Discuss some of the following questions to identify what affected the survival rate.
 - a. What were some of the unexpected situations described on the cards? How did these things affect migration?
 - b. What events caused bird deaths? Which were “natural” and which were “human-caused?” List these on the chalkboard.
 - c. Discuss the list of “human caused” deaths and evaluate the pros and cons of each situation. How do people’s actions affect other animals and each other? (DDT is an insecticide used to protect crops from damaging pests. It has been outlawed in the United States for over 20 years. Scientists discovered that DDT can be passed on from one animal to another, poisoning all the organisms it comes in contact with.)
 - d. What are some of the weather changes shorebirds experience during their migration?

6. Discuss the main threats to whooping cranes in North America: Loss or deterioration of critical wetland habitat (including reduced fresh water at wintering grounds in Texas), low genetic diversity, power line collisions, predation, disturbance at nest sites, illegal shootings.

Take Action:

Zoo:

Have you ever seen a whooping crane up close? If you haven't, you will have the opportunity to do so soon with the Zoo's new Texas Wetlands exhibit opening in the heart of the zoo! Standing at nearly 5 feet tall, with a 7-foot wingspan and bright crimson red accents on the top of their head, the whooping crane is hard to overlook. In fact, a history of human fascination with whooping cranes has been both a gift and a curse for this remarkable species. In the 1800s the whooping cranes' beautiful feathers were used as fashionable additions to clothing, and rare eggs were sold to collectors willing to pay top dollar. The whooping crane saw its numbers drop to just 15 in the early 1940s, which led to the implementation of land protection efforts and public education initiatives geared toward saving this beloved bird. Decades later, whooping cranes are loved not for their feathers, but for their courtship dances and their annual migration to Port Aransas, Texas – the only place where you can see the world's last naturally-occurring population of whooping cranes.

Thanks to zoo-goers like you, we have been able to support the [International Crane Foundation's \(ICF\)](#) efforts to increase the number of whooping cranes in the wild, and we are excited to report that their numbers are on the rise! Surveys conducted over the 2017-2018 winter season concluded that the number of wild whooping cranes has increased to 505, up from 431 the previous year. It's been a long journey for our feathered friends, and while things are looking up, we still have a long way to go. The Houston Zoo recently teamed up with the ICF's Texas office and established a Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator position that will be funded by the Zoo. This individual will form partnerships that include involving hunters, landowners and other members of the community in monitoring and keeping watch over the whooping cranes in their areas.

We are so proud to be involved in this work to help save this unique community of Texans, and thanks to your continued support, this native species has an even better chance for a bright future.

You:

- Use the Seafood Watch app when choosing your seafood
- Plant native pollinator plants at your house
- Use reusable bags at the store and limit your number of single use plastics.