



# PRESS RELEASE

NATIONAL  
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FOUNDATION

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## ENDANGERED WHOOPING CRANES GET AIRLIFT TO NEW HOME

The first of three shipments of captive whooping cranes from the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland arrived at the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin today. These cranes are members of the world's only captive flock of whooping cranes, currently housed at the Patuxent facility. The transportation of the cranes is part of a project coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a second captive flock of whooping cranes in order to reduce the risk of extinction due to disease or other catastrophe. "This transfer is a good example of how we can maximize endangered species recovery activities through cooperation and teamwork with other conservation organizations," said John Turner, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Department of Navy flew the eight rare whooping cranes from Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington, DC to Baraboo, Wisconsin. The flight was flown by Marine C-130 Squadron VMGR 452 based at Stewart AFB near Newburgh, New York as part of a regularly scheduled training and proficiency flight.

"Today represents an exciting combination of partners coming together to help recover the whooping crane," remarked Whitney Tilt, Program Manager for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation standing on the tarmac of Andrews AFB as the cranes were loading aboard the Marine C-130. "The Foundation is delighted to be the catalyst for this cooperative effort with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Federation, the International Crane Foundation, and the Department of Navy," said Tilt. The Foundation provided a \$200,000 grant to support the construction of new pens at the International Crane Foundation to house the cranes. The National Wildlife Federation contributed \$25,000 as a co-sponsor of the project. Both Turner and Tilt also praised the Canadian Wildlife Service for their many contributions to whooping crane recovery efforts over the years.

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Establishment of the second captive flock of whooping cranes increases the chances that this rare species will recover from the brink of extinction. In 1941, only 16 whooping cranes existed in the wild. Today, as a result of cooperative efforts by the U.S. and Canada, there is a wild flock of 133 birds which migrates between Texas and Canada.

Prior to today's transfer, the captive population of cranes at Patuxent numbered 54. In order to protect this captive flock from an epidemic or catastrophic accident, it was decided that some of the birds be transferred to a second breeding center located at the International Crane Foundation's headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The International Crane Foundation was selected because of its extensive experience and success in breeding various crane species. Since 1973, researchers of the organization have successfully bred 13 of the 15 crane species.

The International Crane Foundation will concentrate its efforts on breeding the whooping cranes while the Patuxent Center will continue to conduct reproduction research. A proposal currently under consideration as part of the whooping crane recovery effort calls for using surplus cranes from both of these captive flocks to establish a second self-sustaining wild flock. (An experimental flock established at the Gray's Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho in 1975 has not proven to be self-sustaining, having failed to produce eggs.) A second self-sustaining wild flock would enhance the chances of the species' full recovery. It is hoped that some day the cranes propagated at Baraboo and Patuxent will fly free in the wild.