



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SENDS ENDANGERED CRANES TO CANADA TO ESTABLISH NEW CAPTIVE FLOCK

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has shipped six endangered whooping cranes from the Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, to the Calgary Zoological Society in Alberta, Canada. The June 2 transfer is part of a cooperative international effort to help the rare birds.

"Establishing another captive flock of whooping cranes is one more step toward increasing the numbers of this species," said acting Service Director Richard Smith. "We hope someday to see birds from the Calgary facility flying in the wild as part of a new population."

Captive breeding programs help ensure the survival of endangered species whose populations are very low. Whooping cranes, reduced to a total of only 16 birds in 1941, are making a slow comeback. Approximately 240 whooping cranes now exist, with about 150 in the wild and the remainder in captive flocks at

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Patuxent and at an International Crane Foundation facility in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Establishing new, self-sustaining wild populations using captive-bred birds is a key element of recovery efforts for this species. The only reproducing wild flock of whooping cranes migrates between Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas coast and is managed under a cooperative agreement between the United States and Canada.

Birds produced by captive flocks were used earlier this year in an effort to establish an experimental population of whooping cranes in central Florida. If the Florida release proves successful, Canadian biologists will use similar techniques to establish a migratory population in Canada using offspring from the Calgary facility.

The first captive whooping crane program began at Patuxent in 1967, the same year the species was listed as endangered. To guard against an epidemic or other disaster, the flock was split in 1989 and a second breeding center established at the International Crane Foundation.

Whooping cranes are North America's tallest bird, measuring up to 5 feet in height. Adults are white with black wingtips and a 7-foot wingspan.