



MISSION

BY ILEANA BOARD

MIGRATION



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY



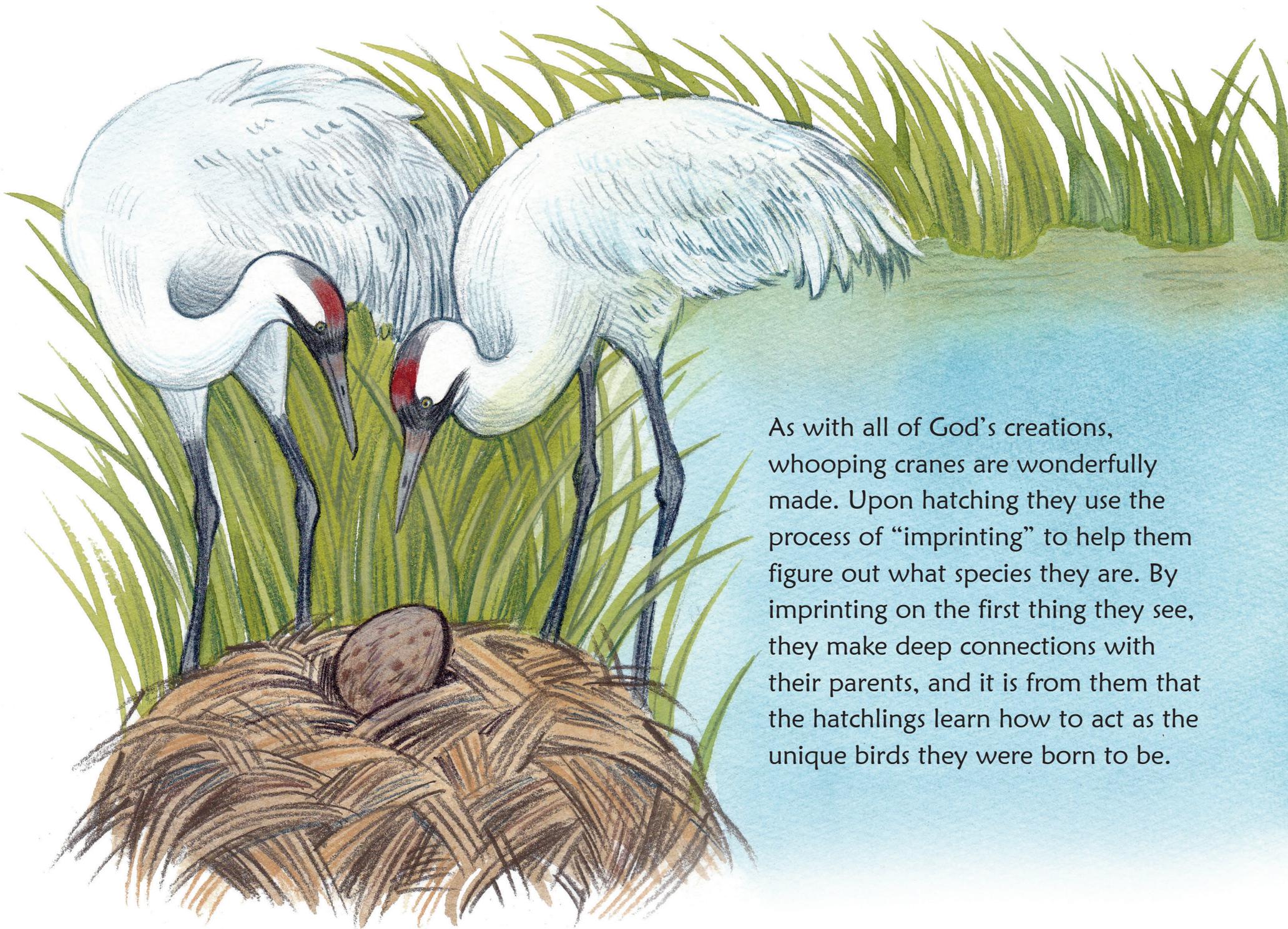
“Whoop! Whoop! Whoop!” The misty stillness of the spring morning is broken by the call. The sun has just barely begun to peek over the horizon, but already the marshes are coming to life, the tall reeds swaying sporadically in spite of the stillness. The reeds are hiding a secret—a unique inhabitant that has not been seen here in over 100 years.

Suddenly, with a *whoosh* followed by the frenzied beating of large wings, a bird takes flight. With a wingspan of 2.28 meters (7.5 feet), its massive body is silhouetted against the orange sky of a new day, an imposing beacon in the Florida landscape.

After a few lazy glides over the marsh, it lands. Illuminated in the morning light, its stark white body, offset by a black mustache and a radiant crimson crown, is fully on display. It stands nearly 1.52 meters (5 feet) tall, a living relic of ancient days when prehistoric birds ruled the air. And like those relics, it almost disappeared into fable. This is the remarkable story of the whooping cranes, the birds that refused to go extinct.

Long ago, the call of the whooping crane could be heard over almost every part of North America, as it is estimated that some 20,000 lived on the continent. In 1860, only 1,400 of these majestic creatures remained. By the 1940s, that number had dropped to only 15 individual birds. The reasons for this massive loss in population were tragically simple: overhunting, habitat loss, and urban development. These factors reduced whooping cranes to one migrating flock. Each spring, the whoopers would embark on the treacherous migration from Texas to Canada. The flock was one disease, one natural disaster away from extinction. Conservationists were concerned; they knew they had to act quickly to save these magnificent birds for future generations.





As with all of God's creations, whooping cranes are wonderfully made. Upon hatching they use the process of "imprinting" to help them figure out what species they are. By imprinting on the first thing they see, they make deep connections with their parents, and it is from them that the hatchlings learn how to act as the unique birds they were born to be.

During a leisurely summer of boating, a Canadian naturalist found that baby Canada geese would actually imprint on him and follow him as he cruised around the lake in his boat. Eventually, they would fly right alongside him as he motored through the water.





Bill Lishman, an inventor and artist, saw this phenomenon, and it filled him with wonder. He owned an ultralight aircraft, which is basically a chair connected to a big fan and mounted on giant wings. What if he could teach geese in flight to follow him in his ultralight? There was only one way to find out. He went home and excitedly told his family that he was going to fly in the sky at the head of a gaggle of geese! They thought the idea was a little far-fetched, but he started working right away in hopes of one day achieving his dream. Mr. Lishman didn't know it then, but it would be a long road of trial and error, disappointment and learning. Three years later, the whir of his ultralight and the honking flight calls of Canada geese filled the sky as he and his feathered friends took their first flight together. He had done it! He was the first person in history to fly alongside birds—he had become part of the flock.



WHOOPING CRANE FACTS

- THE WHOOPING CRANE IS THE TALLEST BIRD IN NORTH AMERICA.
- WHOOPING CRANES HAVE BLACK WING TIPS THAT ARE ONLY VISIBLE WHEN THEY ARE IN FLIGHT.
- DESPITE THEIR MASSIVE SIZE, ADULT WHOOPING CRANES ONLY WEIGH ABOUT 6.8 KILOGRAMS (15 POUNDS) BECAUSE THEY HAVE HOLLOW BONES.
- WHOOPING CRANES ARE OMNIVORES, WHICH MEANS THEY EAT BOTH MEAT AND PLANTS. THEIR TYPICAL DIET CONSISTS OF REPTILES, INSECTS, SMALL FISH, SEEDS, BERRIES, AND MARSH PLANTS.
- WHOOPING CRANES CAN PUT ON QUITE A DISPLAY TO ATTRACT A MATE. THEY WILL WHOOP, FLAP THEIR WINGS, TOSS THEIR HEADS, JUMP UP AND DOWN, THROW GRASS, AND EVEN SING IN DUETS.
- EVERY SUMMER, A WHOOPING CRANE'S MAJOR WING FEATHERS MOLT, SOMETIMES MAKING THEM INCAPABLE OF FLIGHT FOR A SHORT PERIOD.
- A WHOOPING CRANE NEST WILL USUALLY ONLY HAVE TWO EGGS.



