

# Ghost Birds

A SIBERIAN LEGEND SAYS THAT CRANES ARE NOT BIRDS, AT ALL. They are brave warriors who were slain in battle. Instead of going to their graves, these heroes returned to life as majestic white birds—ghost birds.

Swans, too have a central place in the myths and stories

of many cultures around the world. They even have their own constellation. Visible in Wisconsin's summer sky, "Cygnus" spreads its wings gracefully over the Milky Way.

Something in swans and cranes—their size, their beauty, their haunting calls; their fidelity to their mates; their exuberance in dance or in flight—touches the soul and imagination of mankind in some inexpressible way, and leaves us better for it. But for all that humans revere and

celebrate the swans and cranes, we have not always treated them with reverence. The trumpeter swan, North America's largest waterfowl, was hunted nearly to extinction 100 years ago. The whooping crane, the rarest and most endangered crane species, was reduced to a mere handful of survivors by 1940. The Siberian crane, deprived of habitat, faces the very real prospect of extinction in the near future.

## We nearly made ghosts of them,

driving them from their habitats and hunting them to near extinction. But with ingenuity, determination, and hard work, we are restoring trumpeter swans and whooping cranes to their historic ranges, and giving the seriously-threatened Siberian cranes another chance at survival.



In his new book, *Chasing the Ghost Birds*, author David Sakrison tells the story of three magnificent species and the people who are working diligently to save them—biologists, conservationists, aviculturists, pilots, graduate students, benefactors, and volunteers.

## Chasing the Ghost Birds

by **David Sakrison**

Ppbk, 304 pp., b&w and color photographs, maps.

\$16.50 - Higher in Canada

ISBN-10: 0-9792799-0-9

[www.ChasingtheGhostBirds.com](http://www.ChasingtheGhostBirds.com)

Distributed by:

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## Chasing the Ghost Birds

*Saving swans and cranes from extinction*

a book by

**David Sakrison**

*The exciting behind-the-scenes story of three major conservation projects:*

- *Restoring trumpeter swans to Wisconsin and the Midwest*
- *Saving the whooping crane by creating a new Wisconsin-to-Florida migratory flock*
- *A Wisconsin conservationist's historic flight across Russia to help save the Siberian crane*

# Chasing the Ghost Birds is “a true conservation adventure”



“A thorough, accurate, and engaging account of how species can make a comeback.”

— Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane Coordinator,  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

“A fine, detailed, behind-the-scenes look at the efforts to bring back two of the most magnificent birds in North America . . . informative and a masterful read.”

— Sumner Matteson, Avian Biologist,  
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

“A remarkable chronicle” told with  
“balance, accuracy, and lucid  
detail.” — George Archibald, co-founder  
and Senior Conservationist, International  
Crane Foundation, Baraboo, Wisconsin

In early 1989, Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson made a phone call to his friend Terry Kohler, a prominent Sheboygan businessman. It went something like this:

*Thompson:* “Terry, our Wisconsin DNR has put together a plan to re-establish trumpeter swans into Wisconsin. We are going to be collecting the swan eggs in Alaska with the help of the U.S.



Fish & Wildlife Service, and then we have to transport them back to Wisconsin to the Milwaukee Zoo to incubate and hatch them before releasing them into the wild here.

“The major problem we have is that a commercial flight down from Alaska involves many hours and multiple transfers, all the time carrying a box of 50 to 60 swan eggs in one’s lap on the



airplane. I know your company has a Citation V business jet that you fly all the time. Is there any chance you might be willing to fly up there with our guys, and help them out by bringing the eggs back?”

*Kohler:* “When do we leave?”

For Terry Kohler and his wife Mary, it was the beginning of an adventure that has grown to include trumpeter swans, Siberian cranes, and whooping cranes.

Chasing the Ghost Birds follows their journey to tell the story of three of the most important and most celebrated conservation efforts of our time. No other book has described any of these three projects in such scope and detail.



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