

southern wisconsin
BIRD ALLIANCE



Conservation Success Stories to listen to and draw

Directions:

Kids break into groups with one adult in each group. Adults read kids the story, and show pictures when it makes sense. Kids have a clipboard, paper, and pencil. They draw the story as they are listening. Could be a comic strip/storyboard, could just be one picture, could be several little disjointed pictures. Doesn't need to be focused or skilled, can just be doodles. Focus more on listening and learning and remembering, less on the art.

1. SNOWY EGRET

- a. The Snowy Egret is a beautiful bird and almost everything about it is long. Long neck, long legs, long beak, and long beautiful feathers. These feathers are especially long on their chest, back, and head- and Those long feathers are a big part of this bird's story. Back in the 1800s and 1900s people *really* liked fancy hats. Big fancy hats. Often covered in feathers or with whole birds arranged to look like they were sitting on the hats. And what did people do to get those feathers and birds? They hunted living birds.
- b. In 1910, people became concerned about Snowy Egrets and other birds used to make hats. Snowy Egrets were being hunted too quickly and their numbers were dropping rapidly. People formed clubs and talked with their friends about how important birds were. They convinced their friends to do the right thing, and not buy hats with bird feathers in them. They talked with politicians to create new laws to protect birds.
- c. In 1918, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was passed. This was official, legal protection for all migratory birds. Now, people can't sell, buy, hold, trap, transport, or trade Birds. And not just birds, it also protected their feathers, nests, eggs, and bird parts. The only way you can have these things is if you're a scientist and have a permit given to you by the government.
- d. This was GREAT news for Snowy Egrets. As soon as the hunting stopped, Egret populations began increasing. We stopped the problem before it was too late, and they were able to come back all on their own!

2. WHOOPING CRANE

- a. We have all seen Sandhill Cranes on our school grounds or in our neighborhoods. We know these tall, gray, birds pretty well. But they have a relative, the Whooping Crane, that has a very special story. These birds are shaped about the same as Sandhill Cranes, except taller and mostly white with black wing tips.
- b. Both species of cranes spend a lot of time in wetlands, but Sandhill cranes can use other habitats too. Whooping Cranes use wetlands pretty exclusively. When people started needing more land for homes and farming they began draining wetlands. This loss of habitat made it very hard for Whooping Cranes to find food to survive and to find a place to raise young. Lots of cranes died. Who knows what habitat is? People also hunted the adults and collected the eggs.
- c. Eventually, there were only two small flocks of birds. Then disaster struck: a hurricane destroyed one of the populations. In the 1940s there were only 15 birds left in the ENTIRE WORLD. The population grew a little on its own, but they needed serious help. In 1989, 22 Whooping Cranes were captured and sent to the International Crane Foundation in Wisconsin. They started a captive breeding program that has turned this sad story into a success!
- d. Captive breeding means to keep adult animals in a zoo where they produce offspring. The babies can then either be kept in the zoo program to make more young, OR they can be released into the wild. Today the ICF has 31 adult Whooping Cranes, and they produce 10-20 chicks each year for reintroduction into the wild. To get so many eggs, the scientists take the eggs from the parent cranes, which causes the cranes to lay more eggs. That way, each set of birds produces two nests: one for the scientists to raise, one for the adult birds to raise.
- e. The scientists try very hard to raise the baby Whooping Cranes well. They wear costumes so that the baby Whooping Cranes don't imprint on humans. The baby cranes learn how to forage for food by watching the scientists, and how to fly from watching adult cranes.
- f. Just before they're ready to migrate south in the fall, the scientists put colorful bands on the young Whooping Crane's legs. Some of them also get a transmitter, so the scientists can track where they are. The young cranes are then introduced to a flock of wild cranes, and they teach them how to migrate. They return to Wisconsin each spring!
- g. Right now there are 836 Whooping Cranes in the world. That's still a small number, and they're still endangered, but they've come a long way from only 15 birds. Way to go, Whooping Cranes!

3. DDT & Bald Eagles

- a. Our story starts with DDT. DDT is a pesticide, a chemical that people sprayed on their lawns, in natural spaces, in wetlands, and in crop fields. It was used to kill insects like mosquitoes. Mosquitoes can carry diseases that kill many people all throughout the world, so trying to control mosquito populations is important. DDT also keeps pests off of farmer's crops.
- b. What scientists didn't know about DDT was that it builds up in the environment if you keep using it. It kills more than just the insects we want it to. It kills other insects and wildlife, and it also causes birds to make very thin eggshells. Now, there's a lot of science to that part of the story, and we can get into that another time. But a strong eggshell allows adult birds to sit on their eggs to incubate them (which means keep them warm). Parent birds were sitting on their eggs and they were breaking! It was terrible. This problem was especially bad for Bald Eagles, Osprey, and other raptors.
- c. Let's focus on Bald Eagles. Scientists estimate that when the US was founded, we had over 100,000 eagles. In 1963, when your grandparents were young, we had less than 1,000. They had become an endangered species. DDT was banned in the US in 1972 after many years, but it had already been used for many years.
- d. Scientists began to take drastic steps to save the Bald Eagle. They set up programs to help raise more Bald Eagle chicks. First, they worked on getting more Eagle eggs. Scientists took eggs from one nest and brought them somewhere else to raise them. When you remove the eggs from an eagle nest, the parents will lay more eggs. The removed eggs can be given to other adult eagles to raise, or incubated by a machine and cared for by scientists. This increases the number of eggs that would be laid each year!
- e. Once the babies are about a month and a half old they are ready for the next step. Scientists wanted release Eagles into places that used to have them. Eagles usually return to the place that they took their first flight when it's time for them to nest. If we want more eagles in an area, we need to have young eagles leaving nests there. Juvenile eagles that are too young to fly are brought to these new locations. They are fed by humans, and given an artificial nest. Eventually the chicks leave this nest, and are on their own.
- f. All of this hard work has paid off! Bald Eagles were once Endangered, but now they're listed as a "Species of Least Concern". This means that they're doing SO well that scientists are able to focus on other animals that need our help instead. There are about 316,700 Bald Eagles in the U.S. today.











