

Every year, come the changing seasons, millions of birds fly across the vast seas and continents of this planet. Driven by primeval instinct, they fly thousands of kilometers in order to sustain themselves and future generations. Meanwhile, we are aware of mankind's relentless and artless interference with nature's ancient ways, leading to catastrophe and perhaps extinction for many of these birds.

The Western Siberian Crane is one such species; ravaged by hunting and a shrinking habitat, there is only a handful of these graceful birds left in the wild. A team of Russian scientists in the Oka State Nature Reserve, together with the US-based International Crane Federation, have perhaps found a savior for these beguiled creatures in the shape of Italian pilot Angelo D'Arrigo. In the late summer of 2003 D'Arrigo, using a Mosquito equipped Stratos, led six young, inexperienced Cranes over a staggering 5500 km soaring flight from Siberia down to Iran where the highlands meet the Caspian Sea. This was done in order to condition the birds – and therefore all successive generations - to take a new safer route and destination, away from the dangers of Afghanistan's combat zones, which these birds historically took to India.

Forty year old D'arrigo, along with his Stratos/Mosquito combination, was present at the hatching of these birds in the Springtime and so he - and aircraft - became 'imprinted' as their 'father'! He spent the next three months amongst them, feeding them, attached to the glider, starting the motor, soaring above them – all to make them feel that they could follow their surrogate father *manbird* to the ends of the Earth.

On 26<sup>th</sup> August the seven fliers left the reserve and headed south over the Siberian Tundra. During the migration Angelo always tried to use the engine to climb to around 500m before switching it off and folding the prop. From then on it was thermal soaring all the way; up to 4500m over the Aral Desert. What better a combination of flying machine for the job! The quest over the following months wasn't an easy one but they all arrived safely on the warm southern shores of the Caspian Sea. Modern free-flight technology has provide the means for this amazing journey whilst D'Arrigo's courage and determination have rewarded him with a unique and uplifting insight into one of nature's great timeless adventures.