



# In conversation with **LYNNE KELLY**, author of **THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF BIRDS**

**The Secret Language of Birds is set at a Texas sleepaway camp. Did you attend sleepaway camp as a child?**

Yes, I was in Girl Scouts for many years, and would go to summer camp for a week each summer. Our troop also had occasional weekend campouts.

**In recent years, birding has become a popular hobby among people of all ages. How did you first become interested in whooping cranes?**

My interest was sparked by a *Texas Monthly* article about whooping cranes nesting in Texas for the first time in over 100 years. I had no idea! Two couples have wandered over from a nonmigratory Louisiana flock and nested on farmland they found hospitable. They have a fascinating history, with numbers dwindling into the teens in the 1940s before slowly rebounding to the current population of over 800.

**What's the most interesting fact you discovered about birds through your research for *The Secret Language of Birds*?**

I think the most interesting thing was the whale-nightingale song matchup, which Nina has been wanting to share with Iris. If a recording of a humpback whale song is sped up and a nightingale recording is slowed down, they'll match up. It's like they're singing the same language at different speeds.

**Nina is used to feeling like the odd one out, and this draws her to the mysterious female whooping crane. Was there ever a time in your life when you felt like the odd one out?**

Sure, I think most people have experienced that at times. One time that really stands out is when I was in college and went with a few deaf friends to Deaf Day at Six Flags. I thought I knew sign language pretty well, but being in a huge group of deaf people was quite different than interacting one-on-one with a friend. I felt really lost and like I didn't know anything after all. I thought back on that when I was writing Iris's school scenes in *Song for a Whale*, since it was the closest experience I'd had to hers, feeling alone even in a crowd.



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