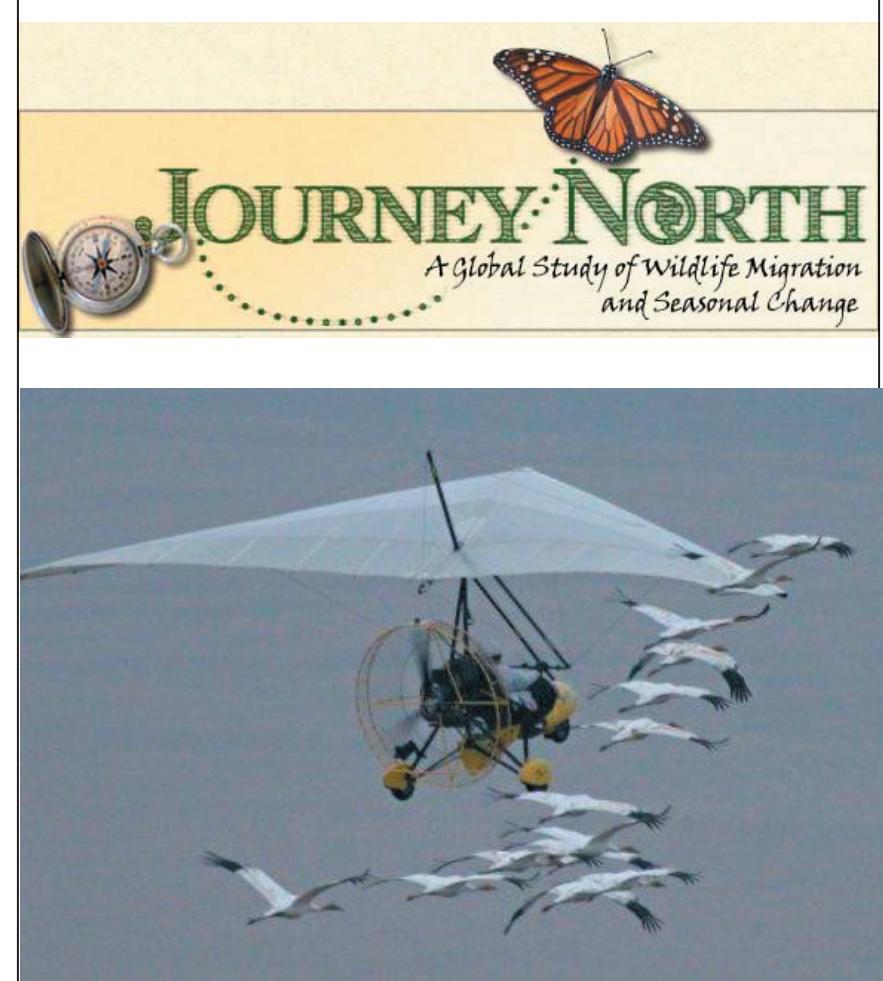




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Whooping Crane Comeback!

by Jane Duden



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A Plane and a Plan

What's going on here? Who are these birds? What is this funny-looking airplane?

The birds are **endangered** young Whooping cranes. They aren't in a race with the plane. They are following the plane on their first migration!

The pilot has taught the young birds to follow this tiny ultralight plane. The plane is leading the chicks on their first journey south to a winter home. If all goes well, the birds will remember the route and return—all on their own—in the spring.



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Bringing Back the Cranes

The planes and cranes are part of an experiment that began in 2001. Scientists wanted to bring the whoopers back to a part of North America where they vanished over a century ago. The plan will help save this endangered species by starting a whole new flock of migrating, wild Whooping cranes, back in their former range.

The plan is working! The new flock is called the Eastern flock. How many whoopers are in the new flock today?

This map shows the Eastern flock's route from their summer home to their winter home.

Changes were made in 2008.

- The route was changed so they didn't cross mountains. The new route is farther west. (It is pink on the map.)
- Now cranes are also taken to a second winter home. (See TWO stars in Florida.)

In which states do they start and finish?



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Cranes migrate, and parents must teach them the way. But with no adult Whooping cranes left in the East, humans had to do the job. Why do you think the Whooping cranes disappeared from eastern North America? Why might scientists want cranes back there again? Why do you think scientists get the chicks to think the ultralight plane is their "parent?"



© Photo Operation Migration

Kids Follow the Cranes

Hundreds of kids all over North America have a front-row seat as they learn about this exciting migration project. In fall, the students take part in an Internet program called "Journey South." Kids get to know this year's new chicks. How do the ultralight pilots get the young birds to accept the plane as their "parent?" Why do the pilots wear baggy white costumes?

In October, the young cranes are finally ready to take off on migration. Ultralights lead them, and "Journey South" kids follow right along on the Web! How long will the risky, 1200-mile journey take? Will the birds all make it safely? Come to the Web!

Did You Know?

- At five feet tall, Whooping cranes are the tallest birds in North America.
- Whoopers are the rarest and most endangered of the world's 15 crane species.
- In 1945-46, all but 15 Whooping cranes had died. They were almost extinct! Since then, this flock has slowly grown to over 200 birds. Today these birds are the **Western flock**. They migrate between Texas and northern Canada.
- Biologists worry when all the world's whoopers are in only one place. A storm, disease or oil spill could wipe them out. The species has a better chance of survival with more than one flock...so *welcome* to the whoopers of the tiny new **Eastern flock**. They migrate between Wisconsin and Florida.

Whooping cranes are making a comeback. Join their adventures on the Web at Journey North!