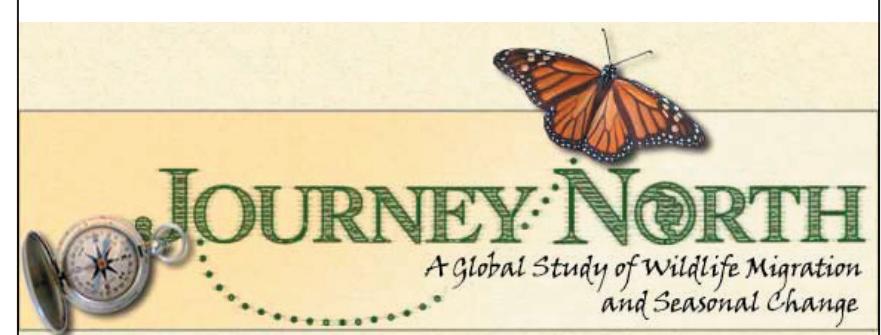




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**JOURNEY NORTH**  
*A Global Study of Wildlife Migration and Seasonal Change*



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## Off to Flight School: Finding Their Wings

by Jane Duden



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## Follow That Trike!

Chicks in the new **Eastern flock** start “ground school” at a few days of age. A puppet called **Robo-crane** encourages the chicks to accept the **trike** (nickname for an ultralight airplane).

A big round pen helps in early training. The fence protects chicks from the trike while they learn to follow it.



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## Hop, Flop, Flap, FLY!

Exercise is important. It helps the chicks grow strong, straight legs and feet.

Chicks may grow an inch a day between 10 and 30 days of age! After that, their body growth slows. More energy goes into growing their adult feathers.

Whooper chicks won’t fly until they are about 60-70 days old. Until then, they hop, run and flap. White feathers replace their rusty **down** coat. Their wings and strong, long black flight feathers grow.





© Photo WCEP

## First Flight

The little chicks take their first flight before they realize they can fly. A small plane flies them from Maryland to Wisconsin, the new Eastern flock's **summer nesting grounds**. Here they should spend

summers for the rest of their lives.

### Why Move Now?

They must be moved before they **fledge** (start to fly), or they won't want to follow the ultralight plane. It will lead them on their first **migration** south to a winter home in Florida. The trike must show them where to go, like parents would have.

Also, birds never forget the place where they first learn to fly. They return there year after year. The site becomes their nesting grounds. Crane survival depends on a good summer home for raising the next **generation**.



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## Flight School in Wisconsin

Each gangly young crane is shipped in its own box. This chick will soon see that Wisconsin wetlands are ideal crane **habitat**. Everyone there is happy to help bring Whooping cranes back to this part of North America.

The cranes spend the next 3-4 months in flight school. Their large pen has both wet and dry areas. Why do you think a net covers the top, and electric fencing surrounds the bottom?



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## One Thing at a Time

A costumed expert travels with the chicks from Maryland to Wisconsin. He or she goes with them to the training strip. The chicks see that the costume is the same. The trike is the same. Robo-crane is the same. Only the location is different.

Next, pilots add the wing to the trike. The chicks get time to adjust to each new change so they aren't afraid.

In years with many chicks, the oldest **cohort** (age group) arrives first. Younger chicks come later, after growing more.



© Photo Operation Migration

## Footrace or Flight?

If you were the pilot, this is what you'd see from the **cockpit**. The young cranes get excited when the ultralight plane taxies past. They run along, trying to keep up. It is part of learning to fly. They do this every day if the weather is calm.

Older chicks are called **colts**. Find the black **primary feathers** on one colt's wingtips. These outer feathers are strong and long to catch air and do the hardest work in flying. Soon these colts must be ready for their 1200-mile migration!