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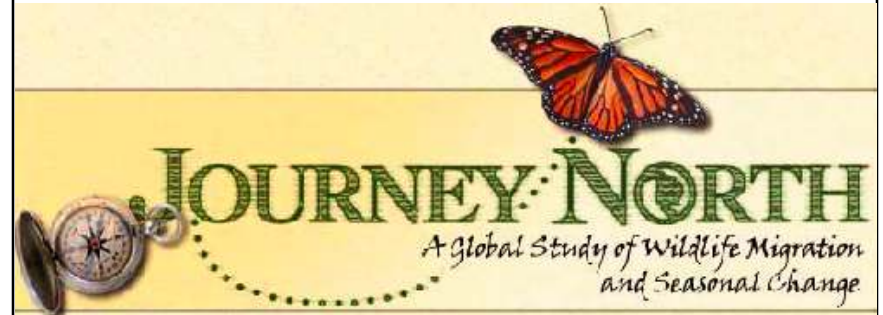


Photo Megan Kennedy, Operation Migration

## Setting Up the Travel Pen

Photos and Story by Megan Kennedy  
Operation Migration

Meet Megan Kennedy! She's in costume next to crane #733. They are inside a pen that "migrates" with the birds to every stop between Wisconsin and Florida. How does the pen travel? How does it go together? How does it keep the birds safe from escape and from predators? Megan shares the story!



Photo Nathan Hurst, Operation Migration

We arrive at the future pen site with the travel pen hauled behind our tracking van. We use 16 panels in each pen. Those green and brown panels are extra visual barrier panels. We use them if we must block something from the birds' view. If needed, those panels are set up separate from the pen.

The panels of the pen are strapped to the sides of the trailer while it's being towed. After driving into the site, we position the trailer before unhooking it.



The first step in putting up the pen is to assemble the panels. We take the panels down from the trailer one at a time. We arrange them in a circle using the trailer as the base. The pen diameter will be roughly 45 feet across. Each panel is hooked in two places to the panel next to it. Every panel is pinned to the ground in order to maintain the pen shape.







Next, the panels are tied down to stakes in the ground. This secures the hooks in adjacent panels and gives the pen greater stability. The pin on each panel also serves as a holder for the flight netting, which will cover the top of the pen.

Why do you think we put flight netting on top?

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After the panels are up, we spread the netting out in the center of the pen. Then we begin raising the net by first hooking it to the pins we've placed above the panels. After the net is up, we add tension by pulling excess netting to each pin. We also add a nail to the center of each panel to help hold the extra netting from blowing back into the pen and to help keep it taut.

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We keep the netting just loose enough to be an easy-up tent cover. Richard, Brian and Chris are putting up the easy-up. Do you see it? The easy-up raises the net above the height of the panels to give the birds more room to spread their wings. That height also allows us to stand up and walk in the pen. The netting provides shade and some protection from rain, sleet or snow. Most important, it keeps the birds from flying out!

We hang the food inside to help keep it dry and we use the legs of the easy-up to hold a divider between the two feeders. We do this so that no bird is able take control over the food and prevent the others from eating.

Before we leave we also hang a plastic model of an adult whooper from the net. Why do you think we do this? We do it to keep the birds company and help maintain proper **imprinting**. (That means to remind the young cranes that they are *Whooping Cranes* and not Sandhill Cranes or other kinds of cranes. Correct imprinting is important for survival of the species. They will choose other whoopers as mates.)



After the inside of the pen is complete, we string an electric wire around the outside. Why do you think we do this?

It can take from 45 minutes to an hour and a half to set up the pen, depending on how many people help, and how experienced they are at setting it up.



After the wire is strung, we electrify it! We carry a battery, grounding rods and a fencer in each of the two travel pens. We leave the electricity on, even if it will be a few days before the birds arrive, in order to “educate the local wildlife” that they should *stay away*. The electric wire keeps predators out, but it also gives a shock or a quick trip to the ground for those of us who forget it’s there!

What kind of predators might try to get the cranes?

The picture on the front of this booklet shows how the pen looks when the birds arrive. Upon landing, the pilots will lead the birds to the pen. They'll put out crane chow and water, which is stored inside the trailer. Finally, the crew will string another electric wire around the perimeter of the whole site. Then they go to the team's camp at our travel trailer-homes set up nearby.

Travel days could be difficult with only one pen. But we have two travel pens so we can set up the pen at the future pen site ahead of time. Here's how it works:

After the birds take off and fly far out of sight, the ground crew packs up the pen the birds just left. I drive the pen down in our smallest RV to meet the pilots and tracker (a person from Patuxent Wildlife Research Center) at the new site, where they've already put the birds away and are waiting for the ground crew to arrive with camp. We refill the water tank and clean and sanitize the water buckets. Then we jump in our vehicles to set the old pen up at the next migration site. We prepare in advance and always have a safe place for the birds to spend the nights.