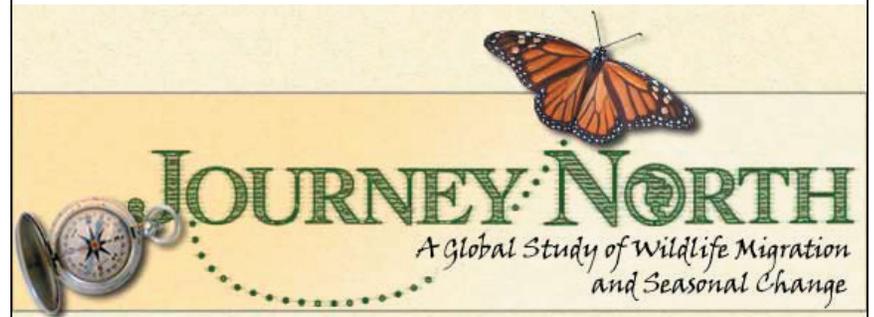




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Life at "Camp O.M."

by Jane Duden



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Building Trust

Hanging out together is a big part of life at "Camp O.M." (That's a nickname for flight school in Wisconsin.) O.M. stands for **Operation Migration**, whose pilots and trikes will be trusted leaders for the chicks' first migration south.

These crane handlers and pilots are always silent. They always cover up with white costumes. They always use puppets. Why?



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Tricks and Treats

Each chick is precious, rare and valuable. Their health is important. Here, **aviculturist** Sara uses a needle to put crane medicine into cranberries. The chicks will gobble the cranberries, medicine and all.

Other tricks help too. What if a chick drops out or won't follow the ultralight plane? A pilot or trainer becomes **Swamp Monster**. He or she hides under a tarp and runs, making scary noises. The chicks learn fast!





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Home Sweet Home

In years with many chicks, each **cohort** (age group) has its own large pen for the first weeks. Later, the two or three cohorts come together in one pen. They need time to work out their **pecking order**—on land and in the air—before migration.

The chicks like the wet parts of their pen. Their long legs are good **adaptations** for wading in water and walking in tall grass. Their long beaks help them dig for food. What do they eat?

The chicks must learn to **roost** in water at night. That way, they can hear a **predator's** splashes and fly to safety.



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Out the Gate and Into the Air

The biggest hurdle is learning to fly as one group. Each day the team of pilots and trainers rises with the sun. They travel to each pen site to conduct the training session—if weather permits. Why do they train the cohorts separately at first?

The colts get excited when they hear the trike coming. A handler lets them out as the trike **taxis** by their pen. They jump and flap and charge down the grass after the tiny airplane. Finally they lift off and fly. They know how to line up and “surf” on the wake of air that rolls off the plane’s wing. How does flying in a “V” help the birds?



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Report Cards in Flight School

By the end of August, the birds fly well behind the trike. They stay in the air longer. Most important, they learn their surroundings from the air. This helps them know where to return in the spring. In about five years, they will mate and hatch chicks here. They will teach their own chicks the migration path. But first these chicks must learn the path. They have no migrating adult parents to teach the way. The pilots and ultralight planes do the job.

The team keeps a close eye on the chicks. Each gets a **report** for every day of training.



© Photo Operation Migration

Over the Treetops

Is that YOU watching from the observation deck? The trike is leading these five over to join with flockmates of another cohort at another pen site. How will the birds get along?

At first, a fence divides the groups so they can get used to each other without fights. Soon the fence comes down. Chicks mingle face-to-face, working out their **pecking order**. The costumed handlers use puppets to break up any fights.

Next they will learn to fly well as one group. Then the young birds will be ready to **migrate!**