

1A

Above it All

By Guy Thorvaldsen

Garbled trumpets call,
Sandhill cranes circling the sun,
Forked sticks for legs.



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2A

Crane Haiku

By Brian Williams

Cranes cronk overhead

Georgia O'Keefe sky beyond –

Dove plays bass below



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3A

Crane Haiku

By Connie Pelton

The crane takes to flight
Soaring quiet in the sky.
Calming those who gaze



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4A

Crane Haiku

By Janet K. Brice

Magnificent cranes
And brilliant wildflowers
Dance on the prairie.



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5A

Crane Haiku

By Lee Ann Willie

Avian terpsichoreans

Ancient spirits

Graceful, strong

Bold Singers



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Cranes in Winter Wheat

By Kate Dike

Cranes in winter wheat
Wings spread, bowing and twirling
Leaping into spring



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7A

Eyewitness

By Ellen B. Ochs

Creaking through blue sky
Four cranes making headway north
Detour for an eagle.



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8A

Haiku for ICF

By Caroline S. Knickmeier

If I witness cranes'
Return flight across the sky
I will not lose hope



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9A

Love Affair

By Jane Ewens

We knew he had you
That first time you went alone
To stalk the sandhill



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10A

Freedom Crane

By Jennifer Grant

Wingtips in the dawn

Rising forth, the freedom crane

Ephemeral grace



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11A

Red-Crowned Majesty

By Andrea Garcia-Dinndorf

Red-crowned majesty

Dancing with your beloved

Soaring high above



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12A

Sandhill Crane

By Doris Ann Hayes

Sandhill Crane...

Forever gangly teen

Awkward til

Airborne ballet begins



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Six Untitled Haikus

By John L. Turner

On braided river,
Amidst the prairie gloaming,
Cranes clamor and call.

Grey business suit,
A splash of color on head,
A stylish plumage.

Deep Nebraska night,
Flocks of riverbound sandhills,
Orion's above.

In morning sunlight,
Checkmarks fly against the sky,
Cranes head to corn fields.

White amidst the grey,
Ranks of river-filled sandhills,
A lone whooping crane.



Snow Blankets the Ice

By Robert Stetson

Snow blankest the ice
Of a partly frozen pond.
A lone crane searches.



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Song for Louisiana 6-12

By Amy Ouchley

No doubt about it.

You are the high marsh goddess.

And he's mad for you.



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Untitled

By Mary Ray Goehring

Life's nature gathers

Crystal rivers to oceans

Sandhill cranes and grains



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17A

Untitled

By Eric Jeltes

In spring mist
A pretty girl
Watches birds



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A Clarion Call

By Hall Healy

Though gangly in limb, their undisputed cries,
Resplendent crowns, unmatched stature
Make these kingly creatures revered 'round the globe,
Company to dinosaurs and *homo sapiens*.

Women adorn with their image,
Monarchs gaze upon their likeness;
Sadly, oligarchs, too, cherish them-
As ornaments in the garden.

Legends abound with their miracles,
Towns, people carry their name;
Why is it then-
Some people shoot them?

They grace cornfields of Nebraska,
Roam rice paddies of Asia, Africa;
We build roadways and dams
That keep them at bay.

Emily said: "hope is the thing with feathers..."
So, let us hear her wisdom,
And while honoring the beauty,
Answer their clarion call.



A Manifestation of Sandhills*By Dennis Collier*

We hear and recognize these sandhills
to the east, the north,
but cannot place them. So we stray
from our predetermined path,
presuming to find them flocking in a field,
fallow, abandoned,
scratching out nourishment
among the scattered leaves,
the stubble of foliage striking
through the first snow
that now recedes. But we never see,
only hear their rattle resume,
again from the north and the east,
the very directions
to which we have returned.
Climbing to the top of a hill,
you chance to look up, and we see them.
We are witnesses
of the long shafts extending from
wings slapping in harmony,
each of the several echelons
an arrow driven
by the north wind piercing
the resistance laid out before them.



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20A

Bhutan

By Delight Gartlein

After a cold, snowy morning watching dancers at the monastery,
Majestic surprise – three black-necked cranes flying south over the mountains
To winter at Phobjikha.



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April Layover

By Susan Twiggs

Sandhill cranes announce their arrival.
I walk lightly,
Observing this pair.
They rest on spindly legs,
Stilts rising from standing water.
For dinner they fly to my neighbor's field,
Foraging for fleeing mice,
Unearthing wriggly worms.
They search for wood frogs
Dipping black beaks into cool water.
Sleeping on a singular leg,
They tuck red-masked heads under gray feathers.
I marvel at these yogis
In balance throughout the night.
The following day they bugle their departure.
Flying above the clouds,
Their cry cracks the sky.



Aransas Birds

By Robin Doughty

They steady the waterway. Lone white posts, points of reference for taking
this big cut through the marsh. Three together, two further off staring
at rumbling barges and boats.

They fix the sky. White flags stretch and ripple, reach upward and spiral
on the south wind to make Oklahoma by nightfall. How many? Perhaps five
or six together, sometimes more, the brown ones have turned angelic white.

They build lake edges. The salt and soda sides, a big river bank where they jostle
brethren and begin to dance. They know its time. Hard weather, even hail and snow
doesn't hold them. Not here, not this far during this season.

They hit the muskeg. Vast empty home echoes with bugles. Plane into last year's swamp,
still ice bound, but about to melt under their glad yellow gazes. Each pair parses the land into white strung
markers. Link the sphagnum and bonsai with new swirls of soon to come long white days.



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Aransas Refuge

By Mobi Warren

Sea breeze ruffles
The marsh grasses
As a pale sun rises.
Feathers dipped
In black night
Fold over
Snow-white backs.
A low tide ripples
Against slender legs.

They rest.

Their migration
Has bound
Boreal forest
To salt marsh;
Their fierce effort
Has woven the World
As One.



Arriving

By Robin Chapman

In a field winnowed of color, brown grasses and stubble
of milkweed stems spilling their seed and silk, we look up
into a sky of gray clouds, tendrils of mist moving over;
look up into the gray billowing shape-shifting masses
where a white diffuse light moves and plays as the bugling sounds—
bubbles like water running through the rocks, but louder,
arriving from miles away, from throats whose resonant vocal tracts
coil five feet of sound into their breastbones, next to their hearts,
travelers gathering here, wherever the continents have drifted,
these sixty million years, meeting before the fall migration.

They are calling, through the mist, family to family, parents
to streaky gray young, they are gathering, twenty thousand or more,
into our sight, great necks outstretched, adults cockaded in red,
long legs clumsily angling down, as one flight after another comes in,
hovers over the dun field, each sandhill crane back-flapping its wings,
dropping down, down onto its long dark legs, disappearing again
into the multitudes gathered here, tall presences, motionless
sticks and grass— only here and there the opening wings of the young,
greeting each other in the courtly strut of the mating dance. The calls
still bugling overhead. Ground beings, we stand, mute witnesses.



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At the Crane Foundation

By Alice D'Alessio

Tall stalks of birds, small visitors.
Why do they all have bracelets?
my granddaughter asks.
Why don't they fly away? The guide
is patient, tells us their stories. We stroll
from pod to pod, peering through tall grasses
at their lethal beaks, their wing-flapping
threats. They are wild and strange and lovely.

To ensure survival,
fifteen species are housed here – those
whose migration sometimes carries them
into war zones. Demoiselles are tiny,
Siberians are huge. The Crowned cranes, from Africa,
flaunt elegant plumes. Refugees.
Most ancient of birds,
if we can keep them safe
in a violent world, perhaps one day
we'll do as much for children.



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Awakening

By Karen L. Furrh

Ethereal silhouette in early morning mist;
Her gossamer shadow merges into the dew drenched landscape
Plaintive cry touches my soul
And kisses the marsh before the regal creature
Spreads her wings to take flight.
Resplendent crane.



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Because They Fly Higher than You Can See

By Mary C. Rowin

Sound of bugling high overhead.

Motivated by warming days, cranes return earlier and earlier. A chilly, wet March snow sends them South briefly and then they are here, rejoining the neighborhood, circling over houses to land in Stricker's Pond, stalking the soccer field, standing in the dried marsh oats of Tiedeman's Pond, long necks forming an s-curve to dip for a tidbit. Then an absence: a lone male pecks furiously at his reflection in Joe's deck door at pond's edge.

Coming home from my morning walk in late June I turn the corner: there she is, tall, self-possessed, a ten-inch fuzz-ball at her feet. We all spend the rest of the summer shadowing them in silence as the family of three drifts through yards, pecks at newly sown grass seed and stops traffic. Soon, the chick resembles the parents, is nearly their height. The now colt learns to dance, practices take offs and landings. One day, in September, a last circling, winding higher and higher. Bugle calls float down with the wind as they disappear into a cloud.



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In the Best Place

By Richard Wilson

Sitting in the prairie
Just before the storm,
Felt the lashing snowflakes
Wishing I was warm.



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Bird Sister

By Mary Mercier

She was new to this world, only two,
and she was tired. But when she saw the calendar—
its photos of the whooping cranes—
she lifted her braided hair
and her eyes were filled with wings.
She looked at those birds
as if they were sisters.
And then I knew that she herself
had only recently come from that life.
And now she was remembering
how it felt to move each primary
into place, how to open the slots,
how to fly, how to land. And will
she be disappointed when she grows up
and finds she cannot find
her wings? Will she scan the human audience
for another face
who knows these things?



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Black Crown Cranes' Horizon

By Alexander Zitzner

Mother Africa's womb swells with pride
during sunrise over your kingdom

watching your shining pools ripple awake
and again breath within the emerald wetlands,

watching you rise from woven sedge and draped in sable silk
trumpet ancient songs of ten thousand molted feathers

tangled with the wind dancing into Her warm bosom,
imprinting with quills the testament of resilience:

She roughed her heart on your cheeks,
carved her soul into every alabaster bone,

draped her dawn along your wings,
poured her dusk in waves across your back,

and finally bestowed herself, a golden crown,
atop you Queens & Kings about to preen.



Building a Nest

By Pam Lewis

A madcap dash of red, flaming like inspiration
above the long surprise of their necks—
two sandhill cranes stand in the rustling marsh,
strangely regal on their spindly legs.

Now they curl down to pull grasses, yank sedges,
toss each one over feathered shoulders,
the pile behind them growing.

Pluck one, cast it away.
Pluck one, cast it away.
Quality control for marsh grasses,
a crane boss somewhere amongst the rushes.

Again and again, so steady, so in tune
with the task, as if they hear an inner music,
a kind of wetland chanty,

like the way we pluck
problems and beliefs, build a thatch
of reasons and ideas, sometimes
on soggy ground while we seem to do something else.



Crane Count

By Beth Sluys

Morning came, bundled with woolen hats and scarves
We headed out with backpacks and binos in hand
Our location selected, and our route planned
To inspire a new birder, perhaps

In the apricot pink sunrise, off in the distance
We hear the call of cranes
And head out for our trek
To count, the birds we seek

First time for the little girl and her Mom,
We are excited about sharing
One of our most favorite things
To listen to birds, to see them
Upon their return in response to the primal seasonal pull

So too, we are pulled to the fields, the bottomlands
Into woodlands, and up onto rises
To listen, to watch, in awe
Of Nature



Crane upon this Prairie Plain

By Doug Getgood

I craned my neck – there again
A crane upon the prairie plain
Circumspect had me see
This crane upon this prairie sea
Waves of more flew overhead
Towards this shore where each have fed
Grains upon this prairie plain
Fed by rain where rivers drain
Gain so much – eyes touch and see
Each to be a part of me
Upon this sea of grass so tall
Meadows where their wings shall fall
Sing this day and evermore
Here upon this prairie shore
Here where grass and life unite
Hear them land and here take flight



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Cranes

By Carla Glewen

Colts, orange and fluffy,
Roaming just beneath field cover, rustling through new marsh growth,
Always within sight of Mom and Dad,
Nuzzling, noshing, neatly keeping watch.
Enduring Sandhill generations,
Starting anew each Spring.



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Cranes

By Ethel Mortenson Davis

At sunset
The birds of heaven
Came in low to land.
A flock of gray and red
Sandhill cranes filled a stage-like sky
With laughter
That echoed across
The wetlands of Superior,
Across the jutting gray rocks
And ragged white pine,
And through
Hearts and lungs
And minds.



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Dance

By Ellen McGaughey

You Sandhills:
Bounding spirits,
Restless fervor, jealous owners of time and space,
Ungainly grace
Catching the fire
Of prairie air
Making bird combustion
Dance!



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Dancing Before Dinner

By Cynthia Grady

The Sandhill crane
Moves to the rhythms
Of a wild orchestra
Only he can hear.
Wings open,
Waving and jerking,
Running on exaggerated
Giant tip-toed steps,
Around the tree,

Like the boy
Sneaking up behind
His grandmother
Sitting at the picnic table
Sipping her tea,
Pretending
She doesn't see
Or hear him at all.



Enchantment

By Mary Kunert

Their haunting cry
Has drawn my eye
To the icy blue Wisconsin Sky

They glide above me effortlessly
I count them blessing.

Blessing from ancient times.
Blessing of virtue.
Blessing of elegance.
Blessing of nobility.

Once they have drawn you in,
You are part of them.



Eternal Bliss

By James Bates

The Last words Mom ever spoke to me
As she lay upon her final bed
Was to open up the window wide
As listen to what the outdoors said
And when I did it came to us
Carried upon a springtime breeze
The echoing call of a sandhill crane
Carrying Mom off to eternity
And now when I walk the lowland trails
I listen among the songs of spring
For the precious call of a sandhill crane
Bringing my mother's love home to me.



Fieldworkers, cranes and wetlands*By Lara Jordan*

The chill of the cool morning air, my breath dancing before my eyes, the warmth leaving my shivering body, as it evaporates to reveal the glory in front of me. The vastness

stretched out icy smooth chilling to the core. The water not quite real, the mist rising, such stillness and silence, as I ponder the dancers. Milling in the water's edge

tipping, dipping, tripping, flapping in nonsensical circles, prostrating in front of one another. A giggle rises from me, my silly bees. I pull my pencil to write a note

my fingers frozen, arguing to move, my eyes reluctant to turn from the beauty to the page. The grassland crisp in a white fantasy. As the sunrise starts to peek

shapes become reality. The welcome heat we all share in, yet the dancers know nothing of me, hidden and discreet. The grassland turns to glitter

in the morning glow, the white blues of the night turn a yellow hue, the whiteness of the dancer's necks, glow golden. As they become restless

to start the day, time to fill their bellies, flapping, jumping and darn right dashing, as the wings warm. Much like the shivering of a butterfly

but with more grace and style, yet less purpose, as if to prove to the morning that they can without a thought. The first few go. The air beneath the wings, my breath

it holds, such beauty and grace, with each beat of their wings, as they fly like dinosaurs from another world. So, bold within the sky. I pinch myself to check

the surreal is still real, how could I be this blessed. As the leaders disappear, the next flight readies itself to go, strolling from the shallows into morning dew. Pressing beak

into the deep, to seek a morsel in the mud below, they rally one another on within a blink the next ones gone. Now the young and foolish left, unsure and skittish, not the best

they move together in a group and take to wing all aloof. Now I'm left alone in the beauty and stillness, the grace that composed the full picture, now flown.



42A

First Call

By Sandi Hoover

Whispered on the breeze
Wavering notes cause
Breath held, tipped head frozen
Are they returned?
A grateful sigh, as wings glint fleetingly
Yes
Another season of cranes



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Flying Graceful

By Laura Rowan

Flying graceful, wing out wide,
A companion crane by its side.
Landing lightly in a field of snow,
Trying to decide to stay or go...
Pecking in the snow for fallen corn,
A tasty morsel to share this early morn...
Unison calling with their heads lifted high,
Dancing, jumping as if to touch the sky.
In an instant a graceful lift into the air,
Stretching their wings, this lovely crane pair.
A true blessing, an honor to see,
An inspiration, you must agree.
May your life be filled with blessing galore,
May you be like a crane and always soar.



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Gathering Gratitude

By Lia Montgomery

In this open space I wait. And watch. And listen.
Life unfolds in this Emptiness
with all the potential of the Universe.
The Earth starts here,
in seed and wind and rain.
Interdependent. Interconnected.
Bound in Love. Endlessly.
Milkweed knows just when to show up for the monarch.
Clover sends out a call to the honey bee.
The joyful homecoming song of the Sandhill
echoes across the waiting meadow.
All is Balance. Beauty. Harmony.
And where am I in this symphony of Life?
Where are we humans?
Through our watchful gaze we give gratitude for this Music of Life.
This is our gift.
And our sacred responsibility.
Our human calling.
Without taking more than we need
we take part in the dance.



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Hidden Love

By Sarah Rose Thomas

Do not see me little one
Do not think of me as mother, as safety
Do not memorize my face, my eyes
like I have memorized yours
you must never follow me away from your meadow

I will disguise my skin with this puppet
the long throat is a white sleeve, my forehead bright red
I will practice turning my hand to see you, baby, with a yellow glass eye
practice picking up and setting down a crawling worm with the long beak that hides my fingers

You are worth it—my little colt
worth never holding your tiny body against my heart
worth never feeling the stretched out fan of your wing
the muscles of your chest
I will miss your hopping flight—a first dance across the marshy earth

Though you have never heard my voice
I can hear your rattling cry from the edge of your reed bed
I can watch your own downy babies follow your gliding walk
I can see the stars your splayed foot has pressed into the mud
and it is enough, little one, it is enough



Hope Without Feathers

By Chenoa Ruecking

Hope without feathers

Hope has lost its feathers
Violent cacophony of idiocy
Retreat to the riverbank prairie
Warm winds embrace, calm
But cold waters are rising
Cranes stand in the water
Parents, hopelessly optimistic they wait
Standing still they wait
Hope never to be hatched they wait
Nest overtaken, cold water rising
Never nestled in the soul



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Horicon Salvation

By Jody Murad Curley

It was the sighing of the marsh grass
that saved me.

It was the singing of sun and cloud,
the ringing of sky
and space.

It was the chance to take a long view,
unbroken by human hands.

It was the freedom to not listen
to anyone or anything
but crow and crane
and wind in creaking trees.

It was the absence of being needed,
except for duck and goose,
osprey and eagle,
heron and hawk,
all needing me to simply let them be.

It was the shimmering of light on water.
It was the patience of earth
that saved me.

It was the peace.



I Stop at the Side of the Road

By Kathleen Hayes Phillips

for there --- in an empty plot of land,
all stumps of corn and dry furrows,
I see a pair of sand hill cranes,
moving in circles in the center of the field,
heads bobbing, bodies held high
on pipe stem legs, they are gleaning,
finding the feast left behind in the stubbled rows.
I make no sound as the male stops and raises
his beak to the sky as though calling to the sun.
His partner copies the movement,
stretching her long neck upward to match his.
He moves toward her, performing
an awkward dance of leaps and rapid flapping
of powerful wings
to which she responds moving toward him,
as he continues to circle around her.
Together they bend and weave into the dance,
celebrating the harvest by jumping for joy!



Kearney, Nebraska

By John Leighton

It is a place that misspelled its own name
Bordered by the main stem of the Platte
Where ever-changing mud-bars and small channels
Frustrate the passage even of canoes

It has its tributes to the various trails
Of history, and they serve up a great steak
But we came here to peer, and point, and wonder
As sandhill cranes plane awkwardly graceful

They reach for land, they stalk plowed fields and croak
A raspy hundred thousand hoarse harsh drill
While as these wanderers of the arctic reaches
Gather here so numerous yet alone

In open fields where nothing is enough
Our lives extend, undeniably, where we are



Life

By Barbara A. Bohachek

It was hot, hotter than it's been for a long time
Everyone seemed grumpy and everything seemed to go wrong
Life closed in around me, I felt I couldn't breathe, so I took a drive
A long drive out of the city, away from the stress of life
I found myself at a wetland area and decided to walk along the boardwalk
Things seemed different, the air, well, cleaner
The sun still hot, but somehow not annoyingly so
I had left the noise of the city behind and found the delightful music of the wetland instead
Crickets, frogs, birds, all sang, each their own part, as if taking their cue from some unseen conductor
And my eyes, well, they beheld a sight so innocently beautiful
Wonderful grasses, sedges and flowers
A splash of purple here, orange over there, and yellow in between
Breathtaking
A rustling caught my attention
They must've been four or five feet tall, whooping cranes I thought
I watched, mesmerized as they took flight
It looked like they had dipped their wings in black paint, ready to paint their message across the sky
Perhaps a message to those who would destroy their home
As they disappeared from sight I realized that I had seen life at its grandest
I had left the city stressed life behind only to find the peaceful life of the wetland.
Just as much life, just as much activity, just as much sound
But peaceful, soothing.
I would forever remember my encounter with the ambassadors of peace
And the wetlands that thrived so fragilely near me



Love Song of the Crane

By Emily Klammer

You found me with your dance
You bowed gracefully
And flapped frantically,
You jumped playfully
And I laughed a long “K-a-r-r-r-o-o-o”
And fell for you
One misty, marshy, day
When winter had gone away.
Years ago you joined my laughter,
Our “K-a-r-r-r-o-o-o” sounded loud and long
Together
Across our swampy home.
We built ourselves a nest,
A soft nest on the ground
And then there were two eggs.
You stood guard, tall and proud.
We nurtured, you protected.
And then our chicks, growing and becoming,
Migrating with us, then without us
And always you and I, singing our song of together.
K-a-r-r-r-o-o-o-o.
For I have you.
Migrating, far away and home again, year pass by.
Endless skies surround us and we fly.
We fly.



Marsh Beds

By Marilyn Peretti

Birds in branches
for the night
do not mock
long legged cranes,

Gravity pulls us all
to our own beds
for respite from
day's winged work.

Trees of leaf
do not hug marshes
but leave them to the sky,
to wane and swell,

like black wet mirrors,
waters soaked with beds
of grasses, shallow, where
tall cranes stand, and sleep.



Migration in February

By Carolyn Light Bell

We trek westward across Interstate 80,
while overhead chatter thousands
of Sandhill cranes, crocheting designs,
merging at the North Platte River,
migrating toward summer homes.

They dip to fatten up in cornfields, and rise again
to roll and billow like seaweed in the surf,
undulating, separating off, flowing back
together in a constantly shifting tableau,
clouds of grace and glory.

Who determines direction?
Which one streaks on,
a slender torpedo,
splitting open the sky?
Mysterious patterns.



Morning at Rowe Sanctuary

By Winifred Lacy

awake for some time

anticipation

bedside alarm at 5:30 a.m.

cursory morning rituals

begin to dress.

long johns

two pairs of socks.

warm jeans

three layers of shirts

heavy mittens heavy scarves

wool hats

breakfast bars

backpacks

binoculars cameras bird books

READY!

A beautiful star-lit morning

Big Dipper and the North Star hang like glimmering jewels in the sky.

groups of silent walkers

primitive hut

sounds of cranes starting to welcome the morning

THUNDERING noise as snow geese leave

cranes taking flight in orderly fashion

off to the nearby corn fields

reluctantly leave the blind

a chattering return

hot cocoa

A TRULY WONDEROUS MORNING



North Reedsburg Road

By Jocelyn Miller

Sunlight cascades
across broad black backs,
splashing into diamond droplets,
exploding into powerful prisms.

Heads of ancient beauty lift,
and espresso eyes touch mine.

My palms feel muscular heat and curve,
not the steering wheel, as I drive by.
I know that velvet nose,
that chiseled ear,
that chest that pulls 1000 pounds.

Cranes call in the field next door.
The sound of dinosaurs
better than any radio.



Ode to Wisconsin Wetlands

By Kathleen Serley

Not the mile-wide vista of Holy Hill
Nor the rainbow's flash on the Weirgor
But a found poem wrote by the tamarack's glow
of a beauty cast on middle ground.

A wavering space of spongy bogs with charm
conceived through turbulence, the swamp creates
from nature's whims an artistry unmatched.

From flooded forests orchids spring and ferns
unfold to leafy heights. The river's rage
accepted, calmed, then shaped to habitats.

A neighborhood of beaver slides, of logs
adrift where turtles sun, and vernal ponds
awash in coded courtship's raucous play.

All tempting me to risk a step
from solid ground to rich surprise, to trust
a footing less secure and give myself
to fluid scapes, to bloom on middle ground.



Out of the Dawn

By Becky Brockman-Schneider

Two cranes crossing
the moon's old crescent,
long legs
looking for landing
among the prairie's
shooting stars.



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Owning Prairie Pastures

By Joan L. Pritchard

Of these prairie pastures, I can tell you of the many times we
walked the crest of hills to bring the cattle home and
found their spring calves hidden in the tall grass.

Sought early wildflowers as we waited for spring to bring majesty,
and laughed as the spaniel leaped in grasses taller than his feathers,
his spirit flying in sheer joy.

We wished our quail would escape the fall hunt and raised our arms in salute
as the migratory flocks formed streams across the sky on their way to winter grounds
and mysteriously found their way in seasonal return.

Our children ran from imagined dangerous snakes when the dusk darkness
caught them on the paths and wandered the hills as Indians in hunt of the
mighty bison they hoped still roamed.

You asked to buy these prairie pastures and I say I can never sell.

This Kansas native prairie I love.
It is my daily conversation with God.



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Pack Mule In September Prairie

By Sandy Stark

Acceleration the option on bumpy ground,
 the driver keeps her Kawasaki mule on course,
 its path a narrow lane between thickets
 of tall plants heavy with bloom or pod:
 the sunflowery compass plant, cup plant,
 prairie dock; old field thistle, swamp thistle;
 the stalky, almost and actually gone to seed
 milkweed, ragweed, sneezeweed; stands of
 stiff and showy goldenrod.

Passengers, a tightly packed tribe, sway
 and duck together as leafy stems bounce
 off vinyl windshield, metallic frame, then
 bend to exposed faces, arms, or elbows;
 dozens of ripe seeds stick to shirtsleeves
 and jeans, pile up on laps, shoes, floor-bed.

Yet still they squeal in pleasure, five boys,
 one girl, even the two old women tasked
 with this adventure, asked to take these
 youngsters only halfway, where prairie
 meets board-walked marsh, then show
 them where to take the same path back
 completely on their own.

Which of course they do, bright voices
 their flags as they find their way home.



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Birds of Heaven

By Karen Mastracchio

Peter called them The Birds of Heaven,
flying high, necks stretched, legs trailing,
flying far in extraordinary migratory routes
covering continents, splendid in their diversity,
reclusive and endangered.

I traveled with Peter around the globe
catching glimpses of cranes – demoiselle,
red-crowned, sandhill, whooping –
then I traveled a stone's throw to Port Aransas
to catch my own glimpse.

Oogling through binoculars from a boat,
a sighting – mom, dad, and chick,
ten minutes further into the wetlands
a second family sighted – all from a distance,
but feeling up close, privileged.

Bundled against the wind, packed elbow to elbow
to capture photos, to record that rare gift,
I felt the grace of heaven offered in those marshy reaches
to a boatload of seekers,
our spiritual journey rewarded.



PRAIRIE GRASSES

For Paul Gruchow

By John Harrington

What if
Pasque flowers dwarfed you as you
Reclined under prairie stars
All heaven-scattered above prairie grasses
Infinite in their reach
Reminding you of your diminished
Insignificant role in a universal scheme of
things where
Even the prairie and the grasses are ever
changing

Where now can you see
Great horizon-sized bison herds, when what
Remains are only clustered preserves of an
Antique land that was carved into plough-
sized plots
Sliced into fading fragments
Shorn of natural wealth
Ebbing from grass stems to corn stalks
growing beneath prairie
Sunshine, starshine, embedded in a prairie sky



Progress on the Prairie

By Duane Whitaker

Blowing flowers bright
Earthy fragrant fruitfulness
Commerce yields to nature



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The Rare Bird

By Peggy Turnbull

A lone whooping crane
struts in beach grass
while hundreds
of white pelicans
meet at a mudflat
to settle into night.

Birders share binoculars.
Don't tell.
Trophy hunters
north of here
shot a harlequin duck
last week.

The big bird stalks
the orange-billed squadron
sidles slowly near
plumps out a place
and roosts among them.

Cover
at least till dawn.



Return

By Judy Kolosso

Nearly every spring morning is it you
who cries out from the marsh north of my house--
sometimes in unison with another
sometimes just a single call?
I like to think the solitary call is yours
as you skim over the cornfield
or stand in silhouette against the sun.

In March I listen for your arrival
hoping you will not only keep your promise to
“fly low enough to lay your shadow on the ground”
but could you just dip a wing
so I will know for sure it is you.



Sailing with Cranes*By Nico Arcilla*

Sometimes what confounds me comes to find me,
saying simply: here I am, here you are, standing in an ocean
of grasses and sand crossed with rivers
holding the sky. I remember the story of Jonah
and the whale, how Jonah kept running away,
how God kept coming after him, pushing him
to do what he was born to do. Where we stand
was once ocean, has now become river. Our ancestors
came from the west, then the east. We meet in the middle.
I kneel in the grass at the river's edge, watching the great birds overhead
as the rising moon hangs for a moment on the surface of the water.
I listen to the river slipping past, tugging at the bank beneath my body,
feeling the spirits of those here before me, like a sailor
steering toward the moon into the coming night, dreaming
of the morning that must follow. The Sandhill Cranes have seen all this
come to pass and come again. They cry out to each other across the sky,
their wings catching the light from the setting sun,
like sails of a thousand boats moving together. Each year
they make this journey, from north to south and north again. Each year
they return here, as their ancestors did before we were born, before people came
from west or east to meet in the middle, to live on the land where ocean became river.
They find each other in the sky and river meeting again and again, showing us
how to go on, how to do what we were born to do, how to find them again and again
in this miraculous place where we never need to say goodbye.



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Sunrise, San Luis Valley

By Lois Levinson

Sandhill cranes rise
in flocks from the waters
of their nighttime roosts,
trilling urgent conversations
as they pass overhead
in skeins that etch
a fine script across
the fresh page of dawn sky.
The sun emerges from
its climb of Blanca Peak,
as the paling full moon
begins its descent
into the San Juan Range.
Between sun and moon,
only the wingbeats of cranes.



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Sanctuary

By Lynn Ogunjobi

sanctuary
walking into the magic forest
the wetland unfolds
all my favorite friends in nature
suddenly
a new bird flies overhead
what is that sound
never heard before
trilling, trilling, trilling
major wings
long, long legs and another close behind
a mated pair
through the air
across the green marsh
into my heart



SANDHILLS: 4 LESSONS

By Star Coulbrooke

On the Platte River,
Nebraska's sandhills, Greater and Lesser.
Four feet high, wingspan seven.
Weight, twelve pounds.
Lifespan twenty.

Lesson 1: How to measure life's accomplishments.
Oldest sandhill on record, 36 years. Banded in '73,
Wyoming. Found again in 2010, New Mexico.

Lesser sandhills fly a thousand extra miles
to gather on the river, join the flock whose flyway
is older than rivers, older than memory.

Lesson 2: Historic metamorphosis.
In a strange land, cranes choose icy water, predator
deflection, blood flow slowed to stand the cold.

These places chosen by cranes,
places of safety, of meaning. For us,
offerings. Tracks we recognize.

Lesson 3: Portal. Cranes wait for south winds,
riding thermals, detecting the lengthening days.
Knowing when it's time.

Lesson 4: Migration.
For what's been re-arranged, outside and in.



Sandhill Crane Migration

By Marianne Werner

If ever you would see them,
as I did, several bright March days
in Kearney, Nebraska, Sandhill Crane
capital of the world, you would marvel:
magnificent, stunning, unbelievable.

Hundreds of thousands pass through
this flat, flat land to settle on the Platte
River at night, eating corn stubble, insects,
worms by day—thousands babbling and
murmuring, purring among themselves.

And if you are lucky, and you endure
the bone chill just before sunrise,
you might witness the great flapping
of their wings, their mesmerizing fly-off,
this explosion of cranes bursting

red-headed, golden-eyed, long necked,
toes thrust outward, gliding—
a whirling surge of sound, indelible
images of flight—something in your
life will have been answered.



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SANDHILL CRANE

By Patricia Carney

Paddling through universe of here
Having lost sight-line of entry,
Exit unseen, kayaker pulled through
Tall blades of winding grass channel,
Walls of green, blue sky, ceiling—

Save for sandhill crane with tall leg
Stilts and neck long as these grassy
Reeds peering over kayaker's wall
Pointing elongated bill toward
Genesis of sandy-bottomed river.



Sandhill cranes

By Barbara Cranford

Pompous as councilmen,
they bob their red-capped heads,
bowing to each other
as they stand about
in the late autumn sun.

All legs and neck,
ungainly as teenagers,
they assess what can be gleaned
from the fresh-cut field.

Suddenly startled, they lift,
and then they own
the field,

 the farm,

 the land.

With the long sweep of their wings
they own the air.



Secrets in the Marsh

By Macy Washow

Birding a near-by marsh in spring
We glimpse a Common Yellow-throat.
Its neon colors blinks a path of gold and black
as it vanishes within the brush.

Startled by our presence,
a hidden Sand-hill pair gives call
with guttural purr. So close
we may have met, golden eyes to brown.

But shy, perhaps protecting nest or young,
camouflaged, they do not move nor fly.
Three times they call alarm, then mute.
Three pairs of binocs vainly search the reeds.

Across the waters comes a distant trill.
Had our pair deserted shield unseen?
No, a second pair with ruby caps afire
stand head to tail to survey all sides.

At rest. They knot graceful necks to feathers preen...
Then suddenly from above, a nesting Redwing
swoops, attacks, his territory infringed.
At first ignored, he dives; the cranes move left.

He trails. The cranes begin to bob their necks,
sporadic, with mounting speed, increasing dip.
They prance; loop round their mate, themselves; toss grass;
fling wings in increasing frenzied dance

Without success... The Redwing holds his ground.
At last, the cranes in gravelly complaint,
take three strides 'til toes in ballet pointe
leave ground. Neck straight, wings power them away.

Returning along the dike we pause
where we heard the first Sandhill pair
but all is still, swallowed in the marsh.
We leave her many secrets for another day.



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Spring Cranes*By G. A. Saindon*

They came while I loafing by the pond
and staring hard for any signs of life
in water hardly warmer than the ice
among the reeds. A pair of sandhill cranes
upon the flattened water where the frogs
should be were soaring circles wonderfully
adroit. The lift was slow, each bird in turn,
to turn upon the rising air to roll
and fall in graceful curling over plume
so warm so soon this year. I stood and gaped
at gifts of birds as high and new. The pond,
a window, opening my eyes to life
above the placid earth and timid ice.
I cannot think of more than watching cranes



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Summer in the Wetlands*By Wilda Morris*

Beginning with one line from Denise Levertov
 To hear the multiple silences
 the pause
 before a Canada goose
 honks out a report to his comrades
 or red-winged blackbirds
 declare their lordship over small claimed territories
 the moment when the breeze stills
 cattails quit swaying
 leaves hold a green gesture
 swamp milkweed blossoms cease nodding
 when the mallard settles on her nest
 and the yellow-bellied slider
 slips unheard from its perch on a floating log
 and a spiral spreads out across the water
 as the sun
 drops below the horizon painting the pond
 in shades of purple
 these silences
 pull my spirit into its own stillness,
 into awe
 openness
 unity
 with the wetlands.



Taking Flight

By Gary Jones

Because the morning sun had not yet risen
he waded into the lake wearing only his feathers
and noticed to his far right along the shore
a white crane, studying him, voyeuristically.

He stood taller, this pale man in his dark feathers,
stretched his neck, cocked his head to one side,
and unflinchingly stared back at the curious bird,
slowly lifting one leg, balancing on a single foot.

The crane shrugged its narrow shoulders once,
coiled itself into a spring, and took flight,
flapping whitely against the dawn darkness.
The man waded into the chill of deeper water,

crouched, and settled onto his back for a swim,
pale limbs thrusting against the black waves,
following the ghostly wake of the white crane

toward the rosy glow of the still distant horizon.



THE CRANE

By James A. Costello

Incarinate on a wrinkled bed of grass and leaves

Free of her incarcerating egg, she

Waddles to her parents' bugled warnings

As they teach her to uncover lunch.

Outside the warming hearth of mother's breast,

Her blood stretches and pulses through all the

Passageways of life. Just yesterday, she stepped

From her downy coat and now bestrides

Their wrinkling water roost. Soon

She will be swimming the evening pool of air,

Her purposed beak puncturing the latent dark,

Body taut and sleek, pumping her

Above the wadded tangle of earthly things,

Searching a place to land on earth's mute canvas

Amid softly shards of newly morning light.



The Last Crane

By Catherine Wohlfeil

The child came towards me, saw him read the sign,
"Whooping crane, last surviving", the child's eyes fell, with a sigh,
I told him my story and he listened in awe,
what I said is as follows, I hope it gives you pause,

"Born I was in a spherical world all its own
The safety of not knowing was mine alone..
Upon hatching I raised my wings out to the sky and in
exultation I cried, I can fly! I CAN fly!!!"

The crane looked kindly down upon him and continued to speak.
"Not much did I ask... a bed of reeds where I'd sleep,
a small crayfish, a safe place to call my home.
The "why" you must answer, the solution unknown."

The crane showed him white wing tips reaching out to the sky
and in dance she threw her head back and sang, with a tear in her eye.
"Yes, the only bird still dancing now stands inside here."
A tear grazed her cheek and she felt the boy's fear.
She said to the child, "We'll be with you always, please don't shed a tear!"

So tell me, who read this, Was I right to give him such hope?
This planet, this green space, is what we call home.
Will I be here to greet him when he comes back next year?
Or will this be empty, sign saying what was here...



The Sandhill Cranes

By Peggy Trojan

For many years
a pair of sandhill cranes
lighted in our mowed field,
walked the outside circle
looking for mice, snakes,
or seeds.

Carefully,
all the way round the edge,
taking hours,
their long necks bobbing ,
legs lifting cautiously.
They were always gone
in the morning.

This year, only one
appeared in the meadow.
It repeated the familiar
pattern just as the pair
had done so many times,
as we all will do
when our lifetime partner
has gone.



To the Whooping Crane

By John R. Cannon

Oh marvelous great white bird,
ancient symbol of long life and good fortune,
embattled survivor
of man's rampage through wilderness,

your beauty enralls the open human heart:
with your lustrous black wingtips
and vibrant red crown
highlighted against
the softest coat of white.

Teach us the art of peaceful perseverance,
steadfast endurance against all odds;

show us the way to carry on
with humble grace and elegance
through every imaginable assault
and constant adversity;

impart to us
some sense of the bone-deep spirit
that will not give up,
will not be extinguished,
no matter what may come our way.

Those of us
with some semblance of sanity remaining
thank you for your example of tenacity,

and we pledge to you
our most fervent and dedicated efforts
to help you continue to survive
for our sake
as much as for your own.



Touching the Earth

By Joe Cox

Where returning to discerned bower
barred owl barks his night work over,
songs of off-key angels climb
from riverbanks of April lime.

Sand Hills Crane's twice yearly flight
mark approaching and departing light.

Wisps of smoking, racing mist,
these few abundant places exist.

Our breaths consort in cold matin air,
evanesce in sun's caustic glare.
We wake to every day's delusory dream,
these hallowed places our lives redeem.



UNDECIDED WINDS

By Leila Cankaya

I am tripping between prairies...
It's stopping and blowing again undecided winds.
Screaming on my head, a crow,
does it call my disaster or warning me?
It cannot talking that, how can I know?

I am tripping between prairies
Outside blowing undecided winds.

Faraway,

Street has been singing it's song
with pell-mell
dustbins full...
How many people even eat,
All the same hungry soul.

First had I where from begun to travel?
How many days, how many months, maybe year,
anymore I can't know, I can't know anymore,
where is paradise, where is hell...



Whooping Crane Chick*By Peg Carlson Lauber*

Through his fluff
I feel the tiny heart
trip-hammering--
a thousand elves
let loose on
miniscule anvils--
only two days old
we're all he knows
so I don't think
it's fear that drives it---
and when did it start?
Within the egg surely,
for he pipped and pecked
his way out;
even before that he
purred back to something,
someone purring
right next to the egg
with eyes closed, love
in her heart for this
marvel, this fragile
explosion of gold.



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Wildness Incarnate

By Rhonda Miska

Stretching 2.8 million years from the Early Pleistocene to today, your continual song of unapologetic bugle proclamation.

Stretching 2.8 million years, the untamable journey from northern boreal forests
along the wide blue ribbon of the Mississippi
through undulating tall grass prairies to the Gulf Coast.

You do not recognize arbitrary names assigned by human interlopers to your many territories:
Alaska, Manitoba, Nebraska, Tamaulipas.

You seek no permission, carry no passport, present no visa.

The evolutionary imprint within your hollow bones and white wings obeys a rhythm far more ancient than labels conferred by rising and falling human civilizations.

You write freedom across the sky in a collective black silhouette at sunset – for those who have eyes to see.

Far above manmade lines, you descend in spirals, calling each other in to refuge.
You dance an ancestral, long-legged two-step in the shine of shallow water.

Then continue endlessly on, up and forward
impelled by nothing less than love, nothing more than wind.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be.
Wayfaring primal birds, you sing a prehistoric promise of journey, community, survival.
I hope we are humble enough to listen.

We, all of us, document our dreams as hopeful pilgrims, alienated aliens, estranged strangers.
Carry us on your wings.



Wings Embracing Clouds

By Lawrence (Lorenzo) Leo

Wings embracing clouds,
the crane elevates
with strokes of blue sky,
inherent strength in intent

Fluttering banners of silk
in a continuity of time,
an imposing presence
in the vast ocean of sky

Walking with pride,
sounds of knowledge,
majestic in being,
always elegant
always aware



MAGNIFICENT WINTER TEXANS

By Betty H. Murphy

Some sand hill cranes make their winter home here in the Texas Hill Country on an isolated stream where pure water rises to the surface from an ancient aquifer.

These wise birds have come to this remote land for hundreds of years, Even during the harsh drought of the 1950's.

In late October, or, by the middle of November at the latest, they arrive for their winter Sojourn and settle into these comforting hills.

Their December evening performances are a fantasy of beauty, music, and Magic. The audience radiates pure joy, perhaps, even ecstasy.

The open-air theater, high above the water is ideal for the evening performance. The curtain rises to the far-away sound of the first bugles. The show begins.

As the sand hill cranes close the distance, the sun free falls into another day. The Sky radiates pink, navy, orange and violet and the cranes bugle louder.

Families arrive, some as few as three, some as large as seven and begin their drop Into this nightly refuge. They descend like a parachute until their legs find the water.

Poised on one, long, leg, nestled amongst their own family, they hope for a peaceful night. The cranes settle into this ancient refuge for their nightly winter sleep.

What a perfect symphony for their audience! These nightly shows continue for the Duration of the winter season. Then the cranes bring down the curtain until next year.

They know when the time comes for the next phase of their lives; they return to their summer homes through the Platt Valley, build nests, and start the cycle all over again.

As ranches and farms get smaller and smaller, and our isolated lands become less isolated, it is even more important for the shepherds of the land to protect these crane sanctuaries.

The Texas Hill Country provides one of the numerous sanctuaries along the Central Flyway throughout Texas.

Our hope is that these magnificent Winter Texans will always be welcome.



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My friend, the Sandhill Crane*By Becky Von Haden*

Ever since I laid eyes on a sandhill crane, I haven't been the same
Those delicate feathers, long legs and musical call are all to blame
I am captivated by their long history,
One I share with others to help lessen the mystery
The sandhill crane stole my time and attention,
I'm under their spell, I don't mind, make no mention
Stories about their lives and journeys are told in countless books,
When I hear their call from overhead, I always scan the sky for a look
I've travelled to Nebraska to witness their migration in the wild as they are,
A beautiful and humbling sight for which no distance to see them is too far
I feel a common spirit with cranes, a shared kinship if you will
I share my passion for peace and nature with the sandhill
I appreciate and cherish all fifteen species of crane as a whole
But it's the sandhill crane that has warmed my soul
Over the years I've learned much about my new friend, the sandhill crane,
Reading, travelling and talking to others fills my brain
I am mesmerized by their beauty, perseverance and family bond
Oh how I wish when they fly overhead, they'd stop and roost on my pond!
The sandhill crane has seized my love and my heart,
But I'm no fool, I knew it right from the start
I do what I can for the sandhill crane, my new friend,
Let their story be told and have no end.



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Prairie Smoke

By Susan R. Bowersox

Snow still lingers—trapped--on icy
Islands of Big Blue Stem, Buffalo Grass or Sideoats Grama—all defeated
Soldiers drowning in a muddy melting sea
The earth slowly relents to the warmer days, softens
And allows roots to take hold and

Push.

The hairy heads of prairie smoke soon follow--emerge bent, bracing
Against the still brisk northwest wind
Patiently waiting for the return of the busy pollinators
The proud bugle of cranes, the love chorus of frogs--fingers strumming combs
Alone and waiting,

Waiting.

Listening, like old women in ragged
Shawls, heads covered, an ear cocked skyward, ready to
Raise their heads to the glorious return
Of the flocks, Sandhills first, maybe a Whooper—if you're lucky.
Location calls & rattle calls pierce far overhead.

Heard before seen.

Ready to face the sun, shake their heads, let loose
Their wispy tendrils--like blonde-pink hair
And let it blow with the wind
Old women straightening, standing tall, turned punk-rock
Prairie sprites, dancing with the cranes and summoning the others to

Return and come forth.



RETURNING

By Gloria Joachim

Can you hear them coming
Do you see them way up high?
Hundreds of cranes flying,
Winging through the sky.

Gliding over tree tops,
Swooping down in fields,
Splashing in the marshes,
Searching for a meal.

Look! The cranes are closer!
Watch as overhead they fly.
Listen to them call a greeting
With their special heartfelt cry.

We treasure how cranes fill our world
With elegance and grace.
Knowing that no other bird
Could ever take their place.



Royalty in a Wisconsin Marsh

By Judith B. Miller

First, a dance of grace,
worthy of the world stage,
and now, this royal march.
A noisy rattling metallic call,
announces this Court's arrival.
Silently the tall slender grass parts;
hidden, I wait breathlessly,
like a mole with an unsatiated appetite.

Single file they come; sleek tall figures,
cheeks buffed in chalky powder
stately in robes of slate grey,
bustled in white, with
crimson clerical zucchetos.
These marsh monarchs march,
orange fluff-ball pages trail behind
like comical court jesters.

The Sandhill cranes shepherd
their young to safety, gleaning
small vertebrates along the way.
Their earthly parenting, I observe
belies their noble stance.
Humbled am I, by this chance
to see this marsh story often hidden
in the pages of a textbook ornithology.



Sanctuary

By Thomas E. Labeledz

Had a chance to revisit the sanctuary,
hike back along the river.
Among the swales of long-gone channels
to the old cottonwood I used to know.
Many changes along the river in the last 40 years
 good to find it had survived.
Already ancient when we first met,
 it must have started when this land was wild.
Settlers would just have been arriving,
 struggling too to survive.
Over the decades the trunk thickened
 and crown broadened.
Countless orioles brooded among
 swaying limbs and rustling leaves.
Years before we met the sand and soil eroded,
 exposing craggy roots.
Some now thick and thickly barked
 like trunks of much younger trees.
Here early each spring I'd snuggle down
 among the roots to watch sandhill cranes.
Facing south I could observe nearby meadows
 sheltered from north wind and warmed by sun.
Season after season the cranes and I returned,
 the old cottonwood always there.
Like the cranes I had to move on,
 cranes and that old cottonwood
 embedded in my consciousness.



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SANDHILL CRANEIMACY

By Jean Unmuth

Craneimacy, a neologism that describes the intimacy, among members of the genus *Grus*, when you return to my river valley; back to the oxbows and sloughs.

Awash in a gloried plumage, stunning fiery crown, by chance I see your river dance;
necks twine 'round, heads dip down, during springs romance.

High stepping through meadows of sedges, like the UW band and Leckrone,
black beaks with razor sharp edges, that defend dappled eggs on the throne.

As if held by an invisible tether, your fledglings kept so close
A regalia of rust colored feathers, wee beaks as pink as a rose.

Each fall perched high in a cottonwood, the crack of rifles all around,
I watch the coyotes and deer as they flee, as you part for the wintering grounds.
Aloft, I send you my sympathy, a blessing to you on the wing,
I can hardly wait for craneimacy, when you return to my valley next spring.



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Sky Perfect

By Laura Waterman Wittstock

The sky cannot be itself
Without the presence
Of long necks floating ahead
While impossibly large bodies
Move through the air, catching
The stream of the bird in front
And taking a turn at the rough
Point, pushing the air aside.

Once they pass going south
Or coming north, we can see
What the sky is made of:
Not weather and clarity,
Sun or rain or snow, but
The natural highway for purity
That took sixty million years
Of perfecting to get here.



The Ambiguity of Aging

By Maureen O'Connor

Gentle flight of sandhill cranes
 black angles suddenly appear in the Nebraska sky
 grey gleaners in early spring cornfields
 nature's recyclers return in clamorous clans
 with a resounding yes to March's infinite invitation
 to find once again the Platte's welcome waters.

Landings like a quiet lullaby; bathed in a Brahms sunset,
 purple and gold, the birds build black islands,
 infinite waterfalls of sound as descendants of
 prehistoric birds remember
 the ancient whispered map.
 While they repeat primeval patterns,
 I wonder— post stroke— if
 a return to intense engagement is
 my journey's call, or
 must I change the direction of my flight?

Like a lone crane I question rejoining my past pattern:
 the intensity and variety of Texas to Alaska
 or
 going east or west of the group,
 perhaps flying not so far, rejecting
 old routes to allow the whisper
 of spirit voices in the silent,
 welcome waters of old age



The Importance of Herons

By Paula Schulz

Still Life and Heron Studies
(About 1900 Henri Matisse)

The paper Matisse has chosen is deep loam--but loam lightened with gold, that warm, rich nature-about-to shine shade, that who-knows-what will come next shade. Herons are sketched here.

Lines weightless as air stand watch over field rows of color swatches--red, gold, ocher, blue, something brown-purple-earthen, some sheer, faint green, and orange--

all these drift over the motionless birds like clouds. And then begins the magic that always comes to us through art. Moving through the paint puddles, they muck about

like children, their bootless feet leave scratches of watercolor--jagged, claw-like. Some shades just themselves, some blending to patches of new color. Now the birds are ready

to lift from the page, draw wingtips through their earth-tone palette and go home, as they do each year, to Dakota fields. New-blue sky is their work, that so-fresh color. And crops

sprouting yellow-green, but keeping in that tint the deeper hue of ripening grain. Soil also and its shade changings by rain-imprint. The red-blessed sunset--all wing painted.

Emptied of everything, they return to the paper, become once again, thin ink, still as sculpture. Long ago they learned:

the world needs them.



The Kiss

By Trish Stachelski

You lean
to kiss me
in the middle
of my
poem and
take my
word
away—
crane
no longer on
my lips
airborne
like the
million paper
cranes
flicking in
the wind
across the sea
in primary colors

and the
rhea
in Bolivia,
a distant cousin?

Ten times
around the
globe
to return
again
to home—

to meadow
and marsh
and corn
fields, fresh mown
a film-flash
memory
of my own



Wakanda, a Whooping Crane's Story

By Sandee Kosmo

Wakanda's spirit fills the air.
She bids a crane's peace everywhere.

Hatched in a refuge one May day,
Wakanda danced in the sun's ray.
With cinnamon feathers so light,
This whooper danced into the night.

Soon her wings will stretch seven feet
That highway in the sky to greet.
North America's tallest bird,
For miles, her loud whoop will be heard.

With one home in the far Northwest,
Scientists sought an eastern nest.
Now they fly from their wetland post
In Wisconsin to the Gulf Coast.

We see black tipped wings in the sky,
A graceful scene as they fly high.
We hear Wakanda in the sky,
And whoop ourselves as she flies by.

May cranes be ever with our earth,
And whoop their comeback with great mirth.
Thanks be to humans and their care,
One day whoopers may not be rare.

Wakanda's spirit fills the air,
She bids a crane's peace everywhere.



When Spring Returns to Lost Lake

By David R. Clowers

I feel as tentative as Wisconsin's
season and move as though my path is slick
with winter's ice, and I hunch my shoulders
against the lingering chill
until I understand why great blue herons
bow their necks when they fly as though they are
recoiling from the shock of confronting
Lost Lake's ungreen spring.

But sandhill cranes when they arrive
fly straight through the leftover cold
and when they walk upon hard April's ground
they stand like storks that have
finished their nights of legendary labors
and have brought new life
to an expectant earth
that still waits for the arrival
of an easy
emerging

spring.



“WHOO! WHOO!”

By Victoria Lindsay

I dreamed I was a whooping crane
flying high above
the heads of business and state,
flying close by my mate,
bugling calls of love.

Her feathers, white as lightning,
her legs like black midnight,
her eyes, the color of buttercups;
so elegant in flight.

We landed in Necedah;
there, to build our nest...

Watching over our little one,
taking turns to rest.

How exciting her first whoop!
How great to be her guide...

Hunting for bugs and phenomenal
fun thermals to ride.

Her feathers, white as lightning,
her legs like black midnight,
her eyes, the color of buttercups;
elegantly awkward in flight.

I try to keep her in sight...

Wait! A wingtip below that cloud,
a silly bugle sound.

Peek-a-boo! I see you!



101A

Untitled

By Doug Varley

There are words and there is grass
Breath brings both alive
You and I hear the conversation of the reeds
As the wind pulses through their leaves

Does the prairie hear us
When we sigh together at its vastness
and the subtle changes in its song
Or remark our smallness
Mixing words of gratitude with concern

The prairie's discourse is dotted with sharp
Turns and joking asides, asters and calling birds
Ours is flatter and less lively
More earnest but reserved
Easily o'er taken by the gusts that blast across the fields
Shouting their indifferent joy to the sun

The plains' syntax is all whirling motion
cast through grass and boundless sky
Ours comprises syllables and propositions
That take an excited turn when lightening dances on the horizon



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Hope

By Cinndy Bunner

Side by side, I'm one of two--
We're lives about to start.
Peeping, pipping, gulping air--
I am the seed of hope.

Hatching, resting, seeing sky--
I stand on wobbly legs.
Downy gold, exploring beak--
I am the sprout of hope.

Growing strong by leaps and bounds--
I flap my new-formed wings.
Answering migration's call--
I am the bud of hope.

Ghost birds walking tall with grace--
Inspiring to behold.
Few in numbers—struggling.
I am the dream of hope.

Majesty—two whooping cranes--
 Towering, soaring awe!
Gracing wetlands—brilliant white--
I am the beat of hope.

Head stretched high, I'm bound to dance
An ancient ritual.
Whooping, calling to my mate.
I am the bloom of hope.

Rarely seen by all but few--
I face so many foes.
Side by side, two eggs again--
I am the grit of hope.

Whoopers gliding thermals high!
May all of us soon thrive.
Let our magic touch your hearts--
We are the soul of hope!



Save Cranes in Nature

*By Abebayehu Aticho together with his coworkers and nature conservation club students
Jimma, Ethiopia*

Cranes are calling us for help
Don't look for somebody to help cranes
Don't wait to say good bye to them
Let us help cranes! Save cranes!
They are parts of our beauty

Let us conserve crane habitats,
The wetlands, grassland, and overall landscapes,
They are pillars of health ecosystem,
An indicators of sustainable development,
Let us stand together for nature,
Regardless of our differences,
Nature's destruction is our destruction,
Its health is our health.

In this century earth's kidney -wetland,
Started spoiling, degrading and losing,
In the north, east, south and west.
Who caused it?
Who can solve it?

As part of nature, we are not created as destroyer,
Adam and Eve our ancestor placed in the garden,
Not as destroyer the nature,
But, placed to establish, protect and conserve it.
From whom peoples learned to destroy the nature?
Let us teach them,
Change their altitude towards nature,
Bring them back to their original mission.



Dressed for the Ball: A Tribute to the Grey-crowned Crane

By Elsie Gilmore

Jauntily dressed

from toe to crest

with golden spikes for a bonnet;

plus black silk shirt

and silver skirt

with scallops all around it.

As if to flirt,

the miniskirt

has bustles and a train;

with beige and brown

and snow-white down,

it's anything but plain.

All told she's fine,

not out of line

for prancing and for dancing.

Her mate will thrill

with echoes shrill

plus stancing and romancing.



The Prairie's Song

By Allyce Vogel

The songbirds begin their warm up
Morning dew is still frost this side of dawn
Despite the crisp and early hour
I have come to hear the Prairie's song

Each minute passing, the sky grows brighter
The birds in earnest now start to sing
Their intricate melodies filling the sky
There can be no question it is spring

The wind plays against the prairie plants
Infusing the music with a serene, rhythmic sound
From the direction of the pond, I hear frogs
Calling over one another as though in a round

As the chorus crescendos, a pair of cranes fly in
They float down, singing a duet as they land
Bills pointed skyward, their vibrato voices
Echo, an affirmation of something grand

The song fills my head, chaotic but pure
And I feel a deep appreciation for its composer
For never more so, than when I hear the song of the prairie
Do I get the sense, that I am closer.

