

My First Crane Migration

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My First Crane Migration , by Alex Duryea, Nebraska Tourism

When I first heard about the Sandhill crane, I was a bit skeptical. I didn't really get it. What could be so special about a common bird? They're not endangered or rare and heck, they're even hunted in other States like Kansas. I've also heard people call them the ribeye of the sky...I don't know if I'll ever get to test that out though.

I woke up in my hammock at 4 a.m. to the alarm on my watch. I listened to the groan of semi-trucks making their way along on I-80. It was still about 35 degrees outside with a steady breeze; I was reluctant to leave the warmth of my mummy style sleeping bag. I poked my head out and glanced at two other tents containing my dad and our friend Steve-o. I had the bright idea of signing us up for a 5 a.m. tour at the [Crane Trust](#) near Grand Island, Neb., and convincing them it would be a good idea to camp out the night before. I called out their names in the brisk morning air and got a grunt from each tent. We packed our gear and hopped in my dad's truck to make our way to the Crane Trust.

After a short stint westward down I-80, we arrived at the Alda exit where the Crane Trust Nature and Visitors Center waited just south of the interstate. Inside the dimly lit facility we were greeted by an old farmer wearing coveralls. He welcomed us and gestured toward a few empty seats in a nearby room containing about eight other people. He introduced himself and listed off a few rules while in the blind: no flash photography, silence cell phones, and no bright lights were the ones that stuck. The old farmer directed us back to our vehicles and instructed us to follow him with our headlights off. We made our way down the highway a mile or so and pulled into a private drive where we exited our vehicles and made our way to the viewing blind.



I entered the blind and was met with an unforgettable view, the Platte River lay still with the moon clinging to the horizon, refusing to disappear. My eyes began to adjust to the darkness and shapes started to appear on the river. Those black masses resting on the Platte that I had originally assumed were sandbars morphed into groups of Sandhill cranes. I had no idea there would be so many.



The sun begins to spill over the horizon, and I notice something: the sound. No not the soft flutter of nearby camera shutters but the cranes, they are getting louder. The sound is oddly soothing, if you can imagine a bird purring and then multiplying it by 15,000. After experiencing this epic migration, every video

I've watched afterward just doesn't do it justice. You have to experience it in person to understand.



Too soon it seemed like the old farmer quietly informed us that we were nearing the end of our time in the blind. We took a few last good looks at the cranes beginning to take flight into the sunrise. The others packed up camera equipment and discretely exited the blind.

Every year nearly 500,000 of these amazing creatures make this incredible journey across the Great Plains. Seeing the Sandhill crane migration is one of the most memorable experiences I've ever had. It is truly a treasure of the Great Plains.

See the Cranes this month at [Crane Trust](#) and [Rowe Sanctuary](#)