

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF SANDHILL CRANES

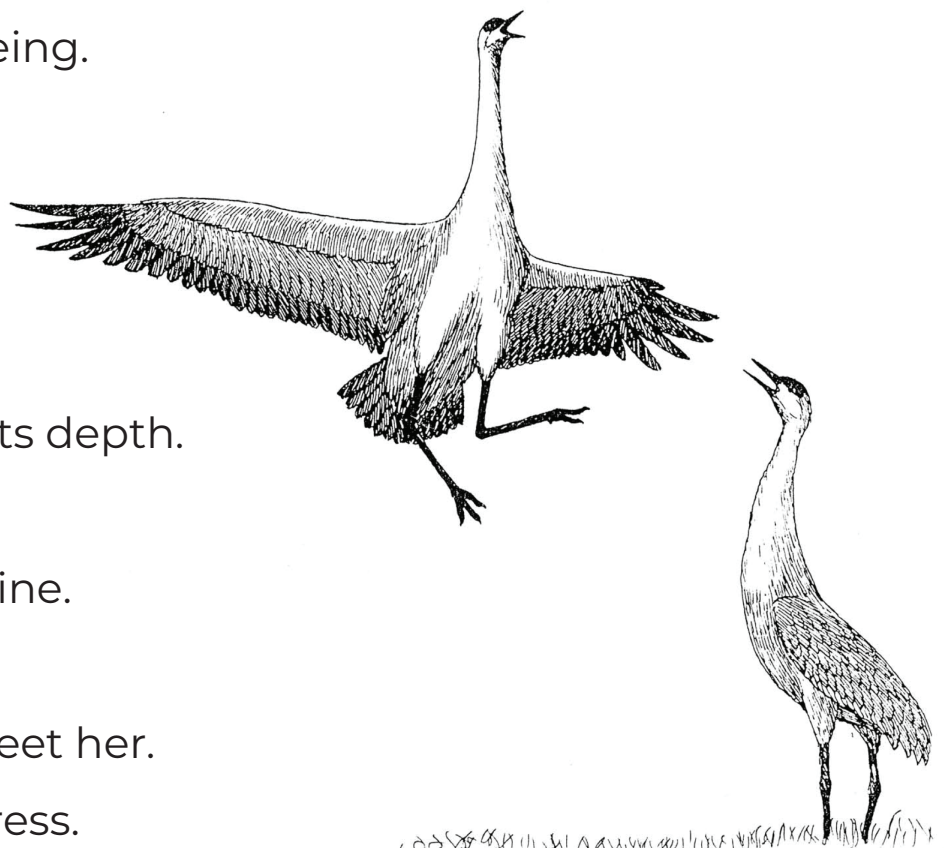
Spring - A Love Ballet

Her perspective

His melody precedes his presence,
His deep croon heard from miles above,
I gaze at the specks of lilac dancing on the surface of the water as he approaches.
He unfolds his wings and begins spinning on his long knobby legs,
Simply observing at first, but soon enamored with the slope of his neck, and graceful
dance, I oblige with a waltz of my own.
For the rest of my time, he will be mine.
The long winter I endured is now forgotten with the hope of a romance burgeoning,
We dance, a duet choreographed by nature's whims,
Warmth fills my feathers, beak, and very being.
I've found him.

His Perspective

I see her before I take flight,
She sits at the water's edge compelled by its depth.
Instinct surges through me.
I know, without a doubt, that she will be mine.
My wings, propel me to her,
A symphony ensues as I grow excited to meet her.
When I land, I waste no time trying to impress.
My entire body takes on a dance reserved for her alone,
Consumed with the movement, she soon dances along with me.
And together we twirl, and spin, and make a commitment.
She is my mate, discovered on this day, simply by nature's fate.
I've found her.



Summer - Fruition of love

Her perspective

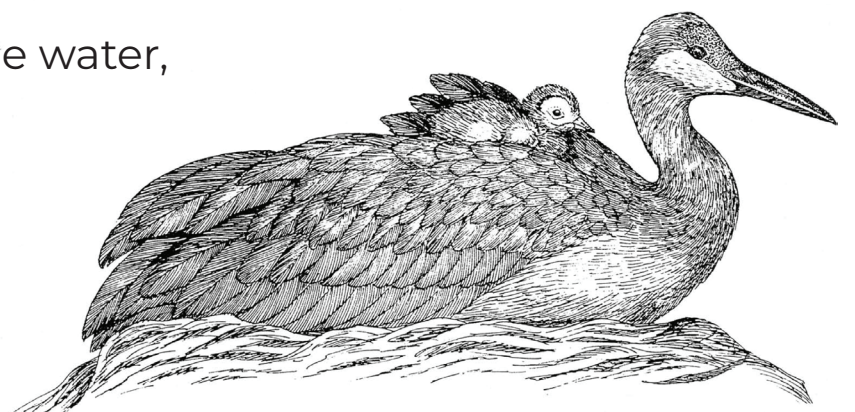
The air turns hot and the trees burst into full bloom,
A month spent in anticipation for this moment.
The olive colored egg cracks underneath me as I keep it safe and warm,
The little colt emerges from the confines of the fragile shell,
And gazes at me with innocence.
My mate and I nurture The Colt.
Soon we will teach it to fly and forage,
How to dance, how to seek a mate, how to survive.

His perspective

The egg cracks and makes way for a new little life,
With wobbly legs, The Colt is barely able to stand.
Much is to be learned before The Colt will navigate this vast land.
My mate nuzzles the new life, while I stand as a protective presence by their sides.
The vibrant landscape will soon turn dim as the nights grow colder,
Our Colt has much to learn before we leave this valley we call home.

The Colt

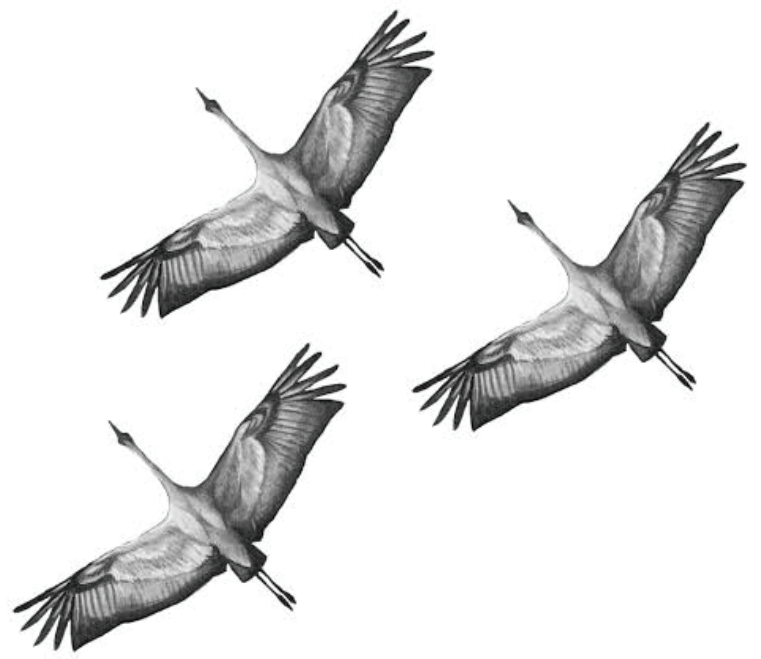
Despite the wind, I feel warm in my mom's wing,
I close my eyes, and awake in the early hour to sunlight's gentle steam.
I nip at my parents, gaining their attention,
Their watchful eyes guide me,
Gently and protectively,
As I stray from the nest made of cattails along the water,
I become familiar with life outside the egg.
Newfound knowledge soon to ensue.



Fall - Yearning for Warmth

Her Perspective

As the wind grows bitter,
And the leaves shift hues,
My mate, my colt, and I depart
Seeking southern warmth found hundreds of miles away.
The first journey with our baby underway,
We stray from the valley, with the knowledge that we will return once more,
When the air warms and the trees return to green.



His Perspective

We teach the colt how to take flight,
Engaging in the dance of the sky,
Preparing for the journey and its introduction to others of our kind.
Feathers that are now primed for flight, and bodies that ache for comfort,
We bid the Yampa Valley goodbye,
Only to return in a year's time.

The Colt

I shed my soft feathers as the leaves transform,
As the air has grown crisp, I stand firmly on my own.
My summer spent learning to scavenge and call out to those of my kind,
To let them know I'm coming.
My wings mature as the days grow shorter,
And I beat, and beat them,
Until, on a fall day, I take flight.
Circling, my wings take me upward
Soon ascending above the valley,
In this dance of survival, my parents soar on both sides.