

A
slate-grey
standing sentinel,
ivory cheek slotted beneath crimson
crown.

With
fluid
beat,
powerful

wings lift from the

flats into an infinite clouded horizon.

Ghosting over still and fragrant prairie grass, the benevolent
herald of spring alights in the lilac dawn. Willow trees whisper in the
delicate breeze; water bubbles over pebble and root. The returning
newcomer watches, unruffled, as beaver lumbers from the creek, and
shakes water from his brown pelt. Beady eyes meet, acknowledge,
move on. With poise and grace, the crane lifts his head,
opens his beak, slim and deadly as a rapier,
and begins to sing.

The valley

lets

out

a

soft,

glad

sigh.

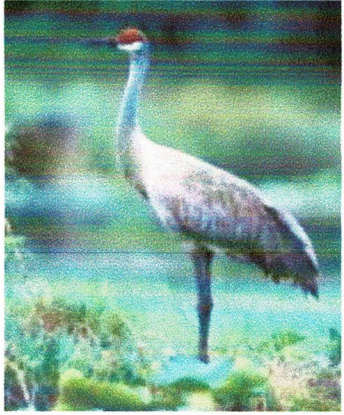
A

new

day.

All is well.

Eldest avian,
Springtime queen of the Valley,
Earth's ballerina.



What color are they?

~~Adult cranes have grey feathers. They paint them with iron laden mud and vegetation to turn them rust color for camouflage during breeding season. They have a bright red skin patch on their forehead. Crane chicks are hatched cinnamon brown and turn grey as they mature. One of the most distinguishing feather characteristics is the distinctive "bustle" that both males and females display. It is visible while the wings are folded. The adornment gives the appearance of an enlarged, somewhat rounded, droopy tail, and often these feathers are confused as being part of the tail. Actually, the embellishment is elongated wing feathers which are modified for display. These feathers, called tertials, are located along the wing close to the body and are nearly invisible when sandhills are in flight. The tail is rather nondescript and relatively short; look for this the next time you see cranes flying.~~