

Spring at Patuxent

IT'S A CHICK LIFE IN WORDS AND PHOTOS

by Liz Condie

FOR YOUR INFORMATION AND ENJOYMENT, HERE IS A PHOTO STORYBOARD SUMMARY OF WHAT WILL KEEP OM'S MARK NIPPER, OUR INTERNS LAURIE LIN AND MAIRE BRADY, AND THE CREW AT PATUXENT BUSY FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.



Eggs from captive birds being incubated

This photo shows the vintage 1940's machine made by the Petersime Company which is used to incubate the eggs collected from five propagation centers throughout North America. The incubator itself is essentially a large rotating cylinder which automatically controls temperature and humidity while turning the eggs. During the incubation period, imprinting begins with a recording of ultralight engine noise/parent brood call played to the eggs.

1



Chick cuddles beneath Crane "Mom"

A stuffed adult Whooping Crane is placed in the box with the new chick for comfort and to ensure it imprints on its own kind. The stuffed crane is set in a crouching position with its wings open so the chick can huddle underneath.

4



Whooping crane chick emerges from egg

Newly hatched Whooping crane chicks are quite small, not quite the size of an adult Robin. They have blue/grey eyes (adults' eyes are yellow) and are covered in a down of fluffy, reddish-brown colored feathers.

2



Whooping crane chick's first lesson

At two or three days old, initial training of how to eat and drink begins. Playing of aircraft sounds and the brood call continues.

5



Hours old chick held in ICU

Less than 24 hours old, the newly hatched chick is still damp from being in the egg. It will stay in an intensive care unit (a small plastic box that automatically regulates humidity, and maintains a temperature of approximately 95 degrees) for at least 48 hours.

3



Learning to eat and drink by example

Because they have the egg yolk sac to nourish them, the baby chicks do not eat or drink much the first day. In the photo, a costumed bird handler with crane puppet demonstrates how to eat and drink to a 3 day old chick.

6

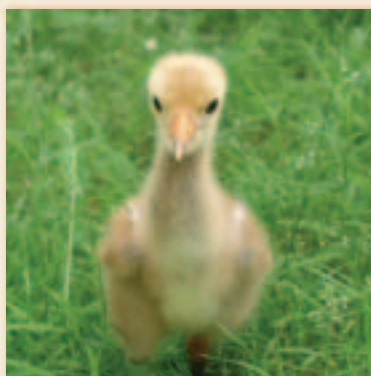
SPRING AT PATUXENT: **IT'S A CHICK'S LIFE**



Chick atop its food bowl

Some chicks are real characters. They often climb atop their food bowl to eat, and then fall asleep only to wake up and start eating again.

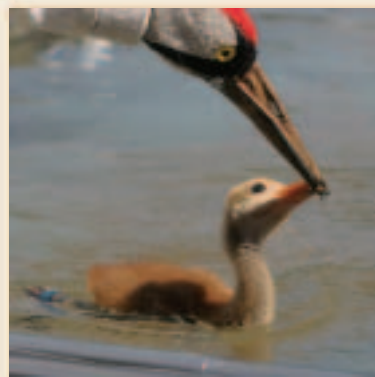
7



Happy to be outdoors

This cute young chick is enjoying its daily outside walk and exercise regime.

11



Learning how to swim

A 10 day old chick is being taught to swim. This is critical to preventing or correcting any leg problems that the birds may have or develop. The chicks spurt up so fast that their legs can grow crooked, rotated, or bowed just like young human potential basketball stars.

8



Early circle pen training begins

Young chicks are introduced to the circle pen for early training. The chick is placed on the inside of the pen while the trike (wingless ultralight) remains outside. This prevents accidents between bird and machine.

Although sometimes disconcerted by its first look at the pen and the aircraft, the chicks soon calm down and within a few minutes start following the puppet around the circle.

12



Out for a walk with 'Momma'

Whooping crane chicks are completely dependent on their parents for warmth, food, protection, and their education. Walks outside are part of the daily exercise routine. The goal is an individual 20 to 30 minute walk, but it is weather dependent and dictated by the total number of chicks to be exercised. After a couple of weeks the chicks can be exercised in small groups.

9



Chick catches on and follows the puppet

The long puppet arm worn by the bird handler/pilot holds treats, and a trigger mechanism allows him to dole them out.

Because of the association with food, the chicks are quick to bond with the long, seemingly scary puppet. As the trike engine is started, a speaker in the puppet emits a brood call, and 'round and 'round go both bird and machine.

13



Learning how to forage

Chicks follow the crane puppet carried by the costumed handlers as they would their natural parents. This enables us to teach them what and how to eat and drink, and how to respond to conditions in their environment.

10



The chick's point of view

The long arm of the crane puppet worn by the pilot enables him to hang its head inside the pen so the little chicks have a target to follow. This phase of training takes a long time, with each little bird being individually conditioned for 10 to 20 minutes each day.

14



Chicks benefit from individual attention so other lessons continue, as does swimming exercise. Depending on each chick's need, ability, and endurance, lessons can last from 10 to 30 minutes.

15

Swimming builds strength and endurance



Once the chicks are older, and their youthful natural aggression abates, their socialization can begin. This allows us to begin training them in small groups, and is doubly beneficial as it accelerates the training process and instills in them the socialization behaviour essential to the success of the migration.

19

Learning to socialize through group training



Because for the first week or so, the birds' natural survival mode rivalry can lead them to try to kill one another, they are separated by plexiglass, but kept within sight of one another.

16

Separated for their own safety



Once the chicks have outgrown the circle pen and are socialized to being in a group, their training moves to a location in an open field. Here, still with the chicks on one side of a long fence and the trike on the other, training consisting of running back and forth for 20 to 30 minutes continues.

20

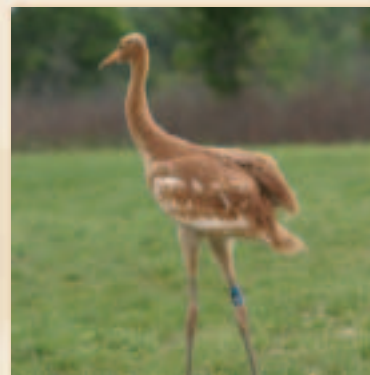
Phase two is runway-like training



The chicks are walked to a pond for their first exposure to a natural water environment. It is here that they begin to discover what a Whooping crane does as it grows up.

17

Learning how to be a Whooping crane



Despite the funny looking little tuft of fuzz on its head, this 45 day old chick is starting to show some white plumage and likely has some black primary feathers hidden underneath. For quick identification it wears a colored leg band.

21

White plumage shows at 45 days old



An older chick gets some individual attention in a circle pen training session.

18

Puppet encouraging chick to follow

Watch for the continuation of this photo storyboard in the summer issue of *INformation!*



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