

Navigator

THE SHOT

By Daliah Singer
Photography by Preeti Desai

Flock to It

Nebraska welcomes one of the world's largest (and noisiest) migrations

When the birds arrive each evening, their bugling sounds like the mounting roar of the crowd in a football stadium. More than 600,000 sandhill cranes—approximately 80 percent of the world's population—float toward the ground, their legs outstretched like a plane's landing gear as they descend upon the shallow waters and sandbars of the Platte River Valley. The four-foot-tall, red-crowned birds take over this stretch of central Nebraska from mid-February through mid-April, making a pit stop on one of the world's largest animal migrations, on the way north to their breeding grounds in Canada, Alaska, and Siberia.

New Jersey-based photographer Preeti Desai, the director of social media and storytelling for the National Audubon Society, snapped this photo at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, near the town of Gibbon. "Each time I thought there couldn't be any more birds coming, hundreds more would fly in," says Desai, who got the shot just before 8 p.m., as the prehistoric-looking cranes were settling down to roost for the night. "Each time I thought the sound couldn't get any louder, those new birds just added to the chaos. It felt like I was hearing them in surround sound."

