

Soaring Putin Leads a Flock of Cranes

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Putin flying in a motorized hang glider alongside two Siberian white cranes Wednesday on the Yamal Peninsula. **Alexei Druzhinin**

President Vladimir Putin flew on a motorized hang glider to lead a flock of young Siberian white cranes in flight — but only one followed him on his first flight.

Dressed in a white costume meant to imitate an adult crane, Putin was taking part in a project to teach the endangered birds who were raised in captivity to follow the aircraft on their southern migration to Central Asia.

The flight in the hang glider proved to be a test of Putin's leadership skills. He attributed the lone crane on his first flight to high winds, which caused the hang glider to travel faster than usual, RIA-Novosti reported. On the second flight, five birds followed Putin, but after a few circles only two had stuck with him for the full 15-minute flight.

Putin stopped off at the Kushavet ornithological research station on the Yamal Peninsula on Wednesday en route to the APEC summit in Vladivostok. Once at the station, he paired up

with a pilot, who sat behind him on the hang glider as they took the birds for a spin.

Putin's flight, given many minutes of airtime on state television, provoked an array of contemptuous jokes on the Internet, one of the most popular being "So Putin is off to wintering with cranes. Does this mean he's not going to be back before spring?"

Art gallery operator Marat Guelman wrote in his blog that the flight shows Putin "has lost faith in us. He sees our treachery, greed, cowardice and cruelty. There's nothing to love in us anymore. Dolphins, cranes, horses — that's a different thing."

Masha Gessen left her post as editor of the magazine Vokrug Sveta this week, saying she was fired for refusing to send a reporter to cover Putin's flight.

After leading the cranes, Putin said he didn't know what he would do next with animals. "That's for the specialists to decide," he said. "It shouldn't be just for fun, but should have some use."

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