

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
TAKING FLIGHT WITH BOOKS ABOUT BIRDS
BY JEANETTE LARSON

This article originally appeared in the May 2012 issue of *Book Links* magazine.



Feathers, flight, and a link to dinosaurs! Birds are amazing creatures and a source of unending beauty and fascination. Since prehistoric times, birds have inspired art and mythology, and our interest in birds is reflected in some of our most powerful symbols, such as the peace dove. Ornithology is one of the oldest branches of science, and new information about birds is still being discovered. Although there is no clear-cut job description for an ornithologist, there are careers for bird lovers in a variety of professional areas, and the study of birds offers numerous opportunities for citizen and amateur scientists to make new discoveries and contributions.

For some children, a pet bird is their first opportunity to view nature up close. For those wanting to enjoy birds in their natural habitats, bird-watching is a great hobby for people of any age. Birding helps to develop an appreciation for nature and requires very little equipment or expense, and birds are found everywhere, including large cities and urban areas.

More than 10,000 species of birds exist in the world, with about 10 percent of those species found in the U.S. Although most birds fly when they need to travel any distance, some are flightless, and the mountain quail of California actually makes its annual migration on foot. The slowest birds fly at a rate of about 10 mph, while the peregrine falcon can reach a speed of up to 200 mph. And although there is still debate among some scientists about the origins of birds, most now believe that birds are actually feathered dinosaurs, a fact that enthralles a lot of youngsters.

As diverse as the bird population is, there are almost as many different books on birds and birding, ensuring something for every bird brain. The following titles are terrific suggestions for sharing in the classroom or for students' own personal reading.

Picture Books

Birdsong. By Ellie Sandall. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Egmont, \$16.99 (9781606841938). PreS–Gr. 1.

A lone bird sits in a tree singing a song. Soon it is joined by another bird, who sings its own song. As each new bird joins the chorus, another arrives, until finally, a big bird lands

with a shriek. This title's cumulative story includes repetition that encourages audience participation, and the bold illustrations reflect the bright colors of the birds.

More. By I. C. Springman. Illus. by Brian Lies. 2012. 40p. Houghton, \$16.99 (9780547610832). PreS–Gr. 3.

A magpie's collection of treasures grows out of control in this vibrantly illustrated picture book. Luckily, when his nest eventually collapses, a few mice help him dig himself out, and as he reduces his possessions, he realizes that three little objects are "enough."

Roscoe and the Pelican Rescue. By Lynn Rowe Reed. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Holiday, \$14.95 (9780823423521). PreS–Gr. 2.

When Tony visits his relatives on the Louisiana Gulf Coast during summer 2010, he learns that the beach is closed due to a disastrous oil spill. He also sees wildlife in distress, and with the help of his aunt and uncle, he pitches in to take pelicans, turtles, and other oil-drenched animals to be cleaned at rescue stations. The illustrations are quirky but appealing, and the information about the oil spill and cleanup efforts is factual.

Novels

Flyaway. By Lucy Christopher. 2011. 336p. Scholastic/Chicken House, \$16.99 (9780545317719). Gr. 5–8.

Isla, 13, loves to go birding with her family, and she shares her grandfather's powerful bond with the swans that migrate to their local nature preserve. After her father collapses and lands in the hospital's coronary-care unit, she finds comfort in a new friendship with a boy who has leukemia; in her connection with a lone whooper swan; and in an unusual school project that takes on a life of its own.

Hoot. By Carl Hiaasen. 2002. 272p. Knopf, \$15.95 (9780375821813). Gr. 5–8.

Middle-schooler Roy Eberhardt, a new kid in Coconut Cove, learns to love South Florida when he joins the effort to help save the home of some tiny burrowing owls. Hiaasen's first foray into children's literature includes genuinely touching scenes of children enjoying the wildness of nature.

Skylar. By Mary Cuffe-Perez. Illus. by Renata Liwska. 2008. 144p. Philomel, \$15.99 (9780399245435). Gr. 3–5.

Skylar, the self-appointed leader of five overweight pond geese, finds himself leading his motley flock on their first migration in this nature-filled novel that includes extensive information on the migratory habits of Canada geese and black-and-white, full-page illustrations. A good choice for a classroom read-aloud.

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Wild Wings. By Gill Lewis. Illus. by Yuta Onoda. 2011. 304p. Atheneum, \$15.99 (9781442414457); paper, \$5.99 (9781442414464); e-book, \$9.99 (9781442414495). Gr. 4–7.

Iona McNair is amazed when she spots a nest of endangered ospreys, unseen for many years in Scotland. Determined to protect the birds and their eggs from poachers, she shares the secret with her classmate, 11-year-old Callum McGregor. The children are forced to seek help when the bird, Isis, gets tangled in fishing line, and after a naturalist gets involved, the community is able to track the osprey's migration to Gambia.

Informational Books

Bird Talk: What Birds Are Saying and Why. By Lita Judge. Illus. by the author. 2012. 48p. Roaring Brook/Flash Point, \$17.99 (9781596436466). 598.159. Gr. 1–3.

Birds communicate in many different ways, through song and dance as well as actions and sounds. Short vignettes and crisp, colorful illustrations explain the meaning behind the various sounds and actions made by a wide variety of birds.

Birds A to Z. By Chris G. Earley. Illus. by Robert McCaw. 2009. 32p. Firefly, paper, \$7.95 (9781554075003); lib. ed., \$19.95 (9781554075546). 598. Gr. 1–5.

This dictionary of birds provides two full-color photographs of each bird, along with a brief description and at-a-glance facts. The 26 birds included in the dictionary range from the familiar to the exotic.

Bring On the Birds. By Susan Stockdale. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Peachtree, \$15.95 (9781561455607). 598. PreS–Gr. 1.

From the great horned owl to the blue-footed booby, birds come in all sizes and shapes. With brilliantly colored illustrations, this picture book explores 21 different species through rhyming verse. An afterword provides brief factual information about each bird and tells where the bird lives.

An Egg Is Quiet. By Dianna Hutts Aston. Illus. by Sylvia Long. 2006. 36p. Chronicle, \$16.99 (9780811844284). 591.4. K–Gr. 2.

Designed to look like a naturalist's diary, poetic text describes similarities and differences between animal eggs, including a variety of bird eggs.

For the Birds: The Life of Roger Tory Peterson. By Peggy Thomas. Illus. by Laura Jacques. 2011. 40p. Boyds Mills/Calkins Creek, \$16.95 (9781590787649). 598. Gr. 3–5.

Through simple text and glorious illustrations, readers

learn about the life of one of the best-known amateur ornithologists. The intense interest that was sparked in Peterson's childhood—and resulted in cruel teasing by other kids—eventually led him to a life of painting, photographing, and writing about birds.

Hatch! By Roxie Munro. Illus. by the author. 2011. 40p. Marshall Cavendish, \$17.99 (9780761458821). 598. PreS–Gr. 2.

In a guessing-game format, readers are asked, "Can you guess whose eggs these are?" as they learn about nine different birds. The large illustrations and format encourage participation and exploration.

Just Ducks! By Nicola Davies. Illus. by Salvatore Rubbino. 2012. 32p. Candlewick, \$15.99 (9780763659363). 598.41. K–Gr. 3.

Zoologist Davies combines fiction and nonfiction in this winning, informative title narrated by a young girl who describes the mallard ducks that live near her. Rubbino's beautiful watercolor paintings capture physiological details mentioned in the story.

Kakapo Rescue: Saving the World's Strangest Parrot. By Sy Montgomery. Illus. by Nic Bishop. 2010. 80p. Houghton, \$18 (9780618494170); e-book, \$18 (9780547529257). 639.9. Gr. 4–7.

The kakapo parrot used to number in the millions, but the population has been reduced to less than 100. This title, an entry in the exemplary *Scientists in the Field* series and the 2011 Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal winner, follows a team of scientists and volunteers who are working to rescue the birds and save them from extinction.

My Baby Blue Jays. By John Berendt. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Viking, \$16.99 (9780670012909). 598.8. PreS–Gr. 3.

When a pair of blue jays makes a nest on his New York apartment balcony, the author follows their progress from nest building to egg laying and hatching to fledglings leaving. More observation essay than story, the conversational text is accompanied by photographs.

Olivia's Birds: Saving the Gulf. By Olivia Boulter. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Sterling, \$14.95 (9781402786655). 598. Gr. 3–6.

Through the sale of her original paintings, the 11-year-old author raised money for the Audubon Society's Gulf Coast oil-spill recovery efforts. A budding ornithologist, she pairs her artwork with tidbits of information about birds that will be familiar to many young readers.

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Pale Male: Citizen Hawk of New York City. By Janet Schulman. Illus. by Meilo So. 2008. 40p. Knopf, \$16.99 (9780375845581). 598.9. Gr. 1–3.

A red-tailed hawk captivated bird-watchers in New York when he nested on the ledge of a Fifth Avenue apartment building. The story details attempts to evict the bird by taking advantage of lapses in conservation laws as well as how supporters rallied to keep the bird and his family in their cozy nest. Pair this with Jeannette Winter's *The Tale of Pale Male* (2007).

The Robin Makes a Laughing Sound: A Birder's Journal. By Sallie Wolf. Illus. by the author. 2010. 48p. Charlesbridge, \$11.95 (9781580893183). 598. Gr. 4–7.

Arranged by season, this journal includes sketches, poems, and thoughts about the various birds that the author sees near her home. It may serve as inspiration for young birders to start their own journals.

Seabird in the Forest: The Mystery of the Marbled Murrelet. By Joan Dunning. 2011. 32p. illus. Boyds Mills, \$17.95 (9781590787151). 598. K–Gr. 3.

The marbled murrelet, a coastal California bird, normally lives on the ocean. Until 1970, scientists had no clue that the birds flew inland to the old-growth forest during mating season to lay a single egg. Written in poetic text that will read aloud well, this title includes fact-filled boxes about the fascinating birds.

Thunder Birds: Nature's Flying Predators. By Jim Arnosky. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Sterling, \$14.95 (9781402756610). 598.153. Gr. 2–5.

In six giant foldouts, breathtaking illustrations bring nature's hunters to life. Revisiting some of his favorite nature spots, the author explores the hunting skills of 20 predators ranging from fierce eagles, hawks, and falcons to gentler pelicans and herons. Many of the illustrations are life-size.

Wisdom, the Midway Albatross: Surviving the Japanese Tsunami and Other Disasters for over 60 Years. By Darcy Pattison. Illus. by Kitty Harvill. 2012. 32p. Mims House, paper, \$11.99 (9780979862175). 598.4 Gr. 3–7.

When a tsunami hit Japan on March 11, 2011, the nest of the oldest documented living bird was in its path. Discover how Wisdom, a Laysan albatross (also referred to as a gooney bird), survived this and other natural and man-made disasters in a life that has now surpassed 60 years.

Poetry and Folklore

Birds of a Feather. By Jane Yolen. Illus. by Jason Stemple. 2011. 32p. Wordsong, \$17.95 (9781590788301). 811. Gr. 4–6.

Fourteen poems in a variety of styles explore the essence of a bird's appearance, actions, and habits. Beautiful photographs bring the birds to life, and fact boxes offer a few scientific details.

Hummingbirds: Facts and Folklore from the Americas. By Jeanette Larson and Adrienne Yorinks. Illus. by Adrienne Yorinks. 2011. 64p. Charlesbridge, \$16.95 (9781580893329); paper, \$8.95 (9781580893336). 598.7. Gr. 4–7.

Hummingbirds only exist in the Americas, but their habitats range from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. In addition to providing basic information about hummingbird biology, this book also features nine folktales from native cultures that offer explanations for the species' behavior and characteristics. Fabric art illustrates the various traits of these amazing creatures.

Loon. By Susan Vande Griek. Illus. by Karen Reczuch. 2011. 48p. Groundwood, \$18.95 (9781554980772). 598.4. PreS–Gr. 2.

This beautifully illustrated prose poem follows two loon chicks from birth to maturity. Hatched in June, the two face many dangers, but they are protected by their parents until they are old enough to care for themselves and migrate to warmer waters.

The Secret Message. By Mina Javaherbin. Illus. by Bruce Whatley. 2010. 32p. Disney/Hyperion, \$16.99 (9781423110446). 398.20955. PreS–Gr. 3.

Based on an ancient Persian poem by Rumi, this picture book tells the tale of a merchant who keeps a colorful parrot in his shop to attract customers. On a shopping trip, the merchant brings greetings from his parrot to wild birds in India, who in turn send messages, which lead to the parrot's freedom.

Jeanette Larson is a library and literature consultant and an author. Her latest title is *Hummingbirds: Facts and Folklore from the Americas* (2011).

Common Core Connections

Active learning connects these books about birds with the Common Core State Standards, from kindergarten to grade 6.

In the Classroom: After talking about how *Hatch!*, by Roxie Munro, looks at one bird at a time while Dianna Hutts Aston's *An Egg Is Quiet* examines the appearance of a variety of eggs, conduct your own egg-observation activity with eggs of different types and sizes from the grocery store. How are they alike? How are they different? Make comparison charts on the wall. Snap photos of the students at work, and create an egg book for the class with the images.

Common Core Connections

- **RI.K.9.** With prompting and support, identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic (e.g., in illustrations, descriptions, or procedures).

In the Classroom: Re-create the bird-watching experience described in *Birdsong*, by Ellie Sandall, and *My Baby Blue Jays*, by John Berendt, by visiting one of the many online bird webcams. Students can watch baby birds grow or see how birds live in the wild. Using these books as mentor texts, ask students to write their own bird-watching stories. Then, ask students to use sound words (onomatopoeia) to write noisy bird stories.

Common Core Connections

- **RI.1.5.** Explain major differences between books that tell stories and books that give information, drawing on a wide reading of a range of text types.

In the Classroom: A poetry reading will give each student a firsthand experience of the rhythm of the words and phrases in a poem as it is spoken aloud. A pair of students can read each poem or page aloud to the class. With *Birds of a Feather*, by Jane Yolen, ask student pairs to read alternate lines of their poem. With *Loon*, by Susan Vande Griek, ask student pairs to read alternate lines on their assigned pages. Follow up by having students write their own original bird poems.

Common Core Connections

- **RI.2.4.** Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

In the Classroom: *Hummingbirds*, by Jeanette Larson and Adrienne Yorinks, and *The Secret Message*, by Mina Javaherbin, are both good choices for reader's theater. Divide the students into small groups to perform these tales aloud. Ask each group to write lines for the narrator to say at the end that will summarize the "lesson" of each tale. (Use Aesop's

fables as mentor texts for writing the lessons at the end of the story.)

Common Core Connections

- **RI.3.2.** Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

In the Classroom: Using *Thunder Birds*, by Jim Arnosky, and *Wisdom, the Midway Albatross*, by Darcy Pattison, as mentor texts, ask students to observe birds in the wild by visiting a bird webcam online. Ask students to keep a log of their observations and make choices about the content and format of their journals: do they want to share their experiences with facts about many different types of birds, or do they want to chronicle the life cycle of a single bird? Where will they add the many facts they find in their research about their birds: on each page or at the end of their logs?

Common Core Connections

- **RI.4.5.** Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.

In the Classroom: Have students create a news report for a video or podcast using *Kakapo Rescue*, by Sy Montgomery, and *Pale Male*, by Janet Schulman. Ask students to form groups and decide what material from each book they can use as background facts and what they can use to form an interesting story. With student actors, interview the "participants" in each book. Decide which point of view will be mentioned first. (Vary the order of speakers among the groups to see if timing influences each listener's point of view. Do listeners empathize more with the first person they hear?)

Common Core Connections

- **RI.5.6.** Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

In the Classroom: Ask students to create a digital narrative about a single bird using *The Robin Makes a Laughing Sound*, by Sallie Wolf, as a mentor text. The narrative could follow a similar chronology of seasons and conclude with a procedural "how I did it" section. Remind students to begin their digital narrative with a dramatic question. Asking a question and then answering it will guide the viewer (and the filmmaker) from beginning to end.

Common Core Connections

- **RI.6–8.5.** Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.