

Explore the secret routes of the skies
from a bird's-eye view . . .

Flight

MYA-ROSE CRAIG

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PUFFIN

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INTRODUCTION

Look around you. Whether you're standing in a field or a town park, if you wait a few minutes, the chances are that you will see a bird. It may be high above your head, or on the ground searching for juicy worms to eat.

I used to notice the birds changing with the seasons and wonder where they went. Here's their secret . . . many of these creatures go on epic journeys every single year. I've been fortunate enough to travel the world and come across the remarkable journeys of those birds, and I want to tell you their stories.

I'm still astonished by the adventures they have. The Arctic Tern, which is small enough to fit in the palm of my hand, can fly around the world, from pole to pole, every single year. Millions of birds fly incredible distances across continents, over mountains and even oceans. They travel on bird highways – routes in the sky – that are followed by each new generation.

These journeys are called migration, and it's tough. Imagine waking up in the morning and walking as far as you can, grabbing a bite to eat (if you are lucky), before finding a safe place to sleep, and then doing this the next day . . . and the next . . . and the next, until you finally arrive at your new home.

So why do birds do it? They're searching for a place that's easier for them to live, with enough food, a place they can raise their young. They may also follow the seasons, escaping from weather that is too hot or too cold for them.

Most migrating birds head north in the northern spring and south in the autumn, to make the most of the long, warm summer days, which are perfect for nesting. Birds seem to know when it is time to migrate, becoming restless. They probably pick up clues from the changes in day length, changing temperatures and food supplies, and they inherit these instincts from their parents.

Some of these migration routes cover thousands of miles, so how do birds know where to go? Scientists are still trying to figure some of this out, but they do know that birds can find their way using the position of the sun in the day and the stars at night. They also look for landmarks, such as the mountains and rivers that they fly over. Some can even sense magnetic fields – which is like having a mini compass in their heads.

Next time you spot a bird close to where you live, just think, a few weeks ago it may have been living on the other side of the world! So, it's time to explore the exciting journeys of seven different birds. I hope this book helps you to fly high as we take to the skies . . .

Mya - Rose

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Arctic Tern
White Stork
Swallow
Black-and-White Warbler
Rufous Hummingbird
Bar-Headed Goose
Spoon-Billed Sandpiper

ARCTIC TERN

The Arctic Tern has one of the most mind-blowing migrations on the planet. This little bird, with its pearly grey back and wings, black cap and blood-red bill, has a superpower. Every year it travels up to 50,000 miles, all the way from Antarctica in the south, to the Arctic in the north . . . and back again. Astonishing for a bird that weighs about as much as a bar of soap.

These plucky creatures can live for up to thirty years, so in their lifetime they can fly around 1.5 million miles. That's enough to fly to the moon . . . and back . . . THREE times!

In the Arctic summer the sun never sets. Yes, that's right – it never gets dark – and for the past few months, our Arctic Terns have been busy using the twenty-four hours of daylight.

They have danced in the sky, soaring up high before gently descending.

The male has brought the female little fish presents.

Then, when they were both ready, they built their simple
little nest on the ground among the nests of their friends.
Once their two eggs hatched, they spent all their time
flying back and forth . . .

back and forth . . .
catching fish to feed their chicks.

They barely had time to feed themselves, and then it was time
to head south again. Winter was coming, the wind was getting
stronger and a sprinkling of snow was beginning to dust the
tundra. Even the sun began to set at night for a couple of
hours. The parents won't see each other until next summer,
when they're back in the Arctic. Until then they'll brave the
long journey alone.

It's time to begin. Our Arctic Tern lifts off excitedly,
eager to start her journey. Her long, thin wings and
tail streamers are perfectly shaped for cutting through
the air and catching the wind. Hollow bones, like the
frame of a kite, make her even lighter.

Our tern knows she is made to fly.

As the flock takes off and heads out over the sea, she quickly joins
them. Watching them through my binoculars, I feel their freedom
as they take to the air. The birdwatchers wave – we know the seasons
are changing now the Arctic Terns are leaving . . .

WHITE STORK

For many years our White Stork has returned every spring to the same barn roof in the middle of Germany, where she and her mate once carefully constructed a huge nest of sticks on top of the chimney there.

Each year they add a little bit more, and now the nest is taller than they are. It is so large that house sparrows and starlings build their own nests inside it! It's been a good year, with lots of food in the nearby meadows, and beetles, grasshoppers and frogs in the damper areas. They have watched their chicks grow from balls of fluff to their full enormous size. The chicks test their huge black-and-white wings by standing on top of their nest and frantically flapping.

*In the olden days, people used to tell stories
about storks carrying babies with them in a
cloth bundle when they returned in the spring.
They'd drop them down the chimney to the
hopeful family. Children would sing to the storks
or put sweets for them on the windowsill.*

Two sisters who watched the storks from their house thought this
was a funny idea. Everyone knows where babies really come from!
They were fascinated by the storks, though. Every day before school,
they would look for the chicks in their big nest on top of the barn.
Sometimes – if they were lucky – they would spot a young bird
peering right back at them. By the end of the summer, the young
birds had grown as big as their parents and the girls knew that
it was nearly time for them to go.

Other storks start passing overhead, their long necks
stretching towards the south. Our White Stork gazes
up from her nest and she takes one, two, three flaps
of her mighty wings. She soars upwards to join them.

They'll be back next spring. Our same white
stork will join her partner, raising another fluffy
brood. But first, she's going on her travels . . .