

About the Birds in Charles Harper's Art

For more information see specific Bird Fact Sheets.

Wood Ibis

Sacred Ibis in myth and legend:

Venerated and often mummified by Ancient Egyptians as a symbol of the god Thoth, the Ibis was according to Herodotus and Pliny the Elder also invoked against incursions of serpents. It was also said that the flies that brought pestilence died immediately upon propitiatory sacrifices of this bird.

There are 19 species of stork in six genera. Stork remains have been identified from the Upper Eocene (about 40 million years ago) in France, and the group was distinct in the early part of the Tertiary (about 65 million years ago). Traditionally storks are placed taxonomically with other long-legged wading birds such as herons, but their nearest relatives may be New World vultures such as the ubiquitous turkey vulture. Although the similarities are not immediately apparent, DNA analysis supports this conclusion. Interestingly, both New World vultures and storks share the rather unpleasant habit of defecating on their own legs to facilitate heat loss.

Indigo Bunting

The Indigo Bunting will migrate during the night, using the stars to direct itself. In captivity, since they cannot migrate, they experience disorientation in April/May and in September/October if they cannot see the stars from their enclosure.

The male does not generally help with incubation or raising the chicks. The female chooses the nest site and builds the nest. She broods the altricial chicks for the first few days after they hatch, feeds them insects and removes their fecal sacs from the nest. The chicks leave the nest 8 to 14 days after hatching, and become independent about 3 weeks after fledging.

Indigo Buntings are actually black; the diffraction of light through their feathers makes them look blue. This explains why males can appear many shades from turquoise to black.

Murre

In the Atlantic, some populations include "bridled" or "ringed" individuals, which have a white eye-ring and a white line extending backward from the eyes. Bridled birds are more common farther north.

The common murre is one of the success stories of the sea – about 10 million breed in the northern parts of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Many of the features of murre's life history show just how difficult life at sea is. Murre's don't even try to breed for the first time until they're five or six years old and murre's lay only one egg in a clutch, probably because the difficulty of finding food means that they are able to feed only one chick. Both parents take turns incubating the egg on a bare rock ledge.

The high degree of variation in color and markings of the eggs may allow parent murre's to recognize their own egg when they return to the colony from time at sea. The egg Murre is so pointed at one end that when placed on a flat surface and pushed, it rolls around in a circle. Such a shape may help keep the egg from rolling off of its nesting shelf.

Kingbird

The Eastern Kingbird is highly aggressive toward nest predators and larger birds. Hawks and crows are attacked regularly. A kingbird was observed to knock a Blue Jay out of a tree and cause it to hide under bush to escape the attack.

During the summer the Eastern Kingbird eats mostly flying insects and maintains a breeding territory that it defends vigorously against all other kingbirds. In the winter along the Amazon, however, it has a completely different lifestyle: it travels in flocks and eats fruit.

Magpie

Magpies are symbols of good luck in China and Korea, in contrast with their relatives the crows, which are portents of bad omens. In Britain and Ireland, magpies may represent good or bad luck of various forms in a complex manner, depending on the number of magpies present, according to various traditional rhymes starting "One for sorrow, two for joy,..." or "One for sorrow, two for mirth,..." The bird was referred to as a **pie** until the late 16th century when the feminine name **Mag** was added to the beginning.

Magpies are known to steal other young birds, commonly young chickens, away from their nests.

Red-Eyed Vireo

Although animal food makes up 85 percent of its summer diet, the Red-eyed Vireo may be completely frugivorous (fruit-eating) during the winter.

The Red-eyed Vireo is a common host to the Brown-headed Cowbird, which lays its eggs in the vireo's nest.

The average lifespan of the Red-Eyed Vireo is 10 years. It migrates in April and returns by around May 9. Then it migrates again in October and is completely gone by November. Its fledgling stage is about 10 to 12 days.

Carolina Parakeet

The last Carolina Parakeet (*conuropsis carolines*) known to humans was Incas. Incas died on February 21st, 1918. Incas, his keepers at the Cincinnati Zoo claim, died of a broken heart, not of old age, even though he and his mate, Lady Jane, had lived in the zoo for over 32 years. Lady Jane died the summer before Incas died and he pined through the fall and winter.

It was the only parrot species native to the eastern United States. It was found from the Ohio Valley to the Gulf of Mexico, and lived in old forests along rivers. The Carolina Parakeet died out because of a number of different threats. To make space for more agricultural land, large areas of forest were cut down, taking away its habitat. The colorful feathers (green body, yellow head, and red around the bill) were in demand as decorations in ladies' hats, and the birds were kept as pets. Even though the birds bred easily in captivity, little was done by owners to increase the population of tamed birds. Finally, they were killed in large numbers because farmers considered them a pest.

Rose-Breasted Grosbeak

The nest of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak is so thinly constructed that eggs often can be seen from below through the nest.

The male Rose-breasted Grosbeak participates in incubation of the eggs, accounting for about 1/3 of the time during the day (the female incubates over night). Both sexes sing quietly to each other when they exchange places. The male will sing his normal song while near or actually on the nest.