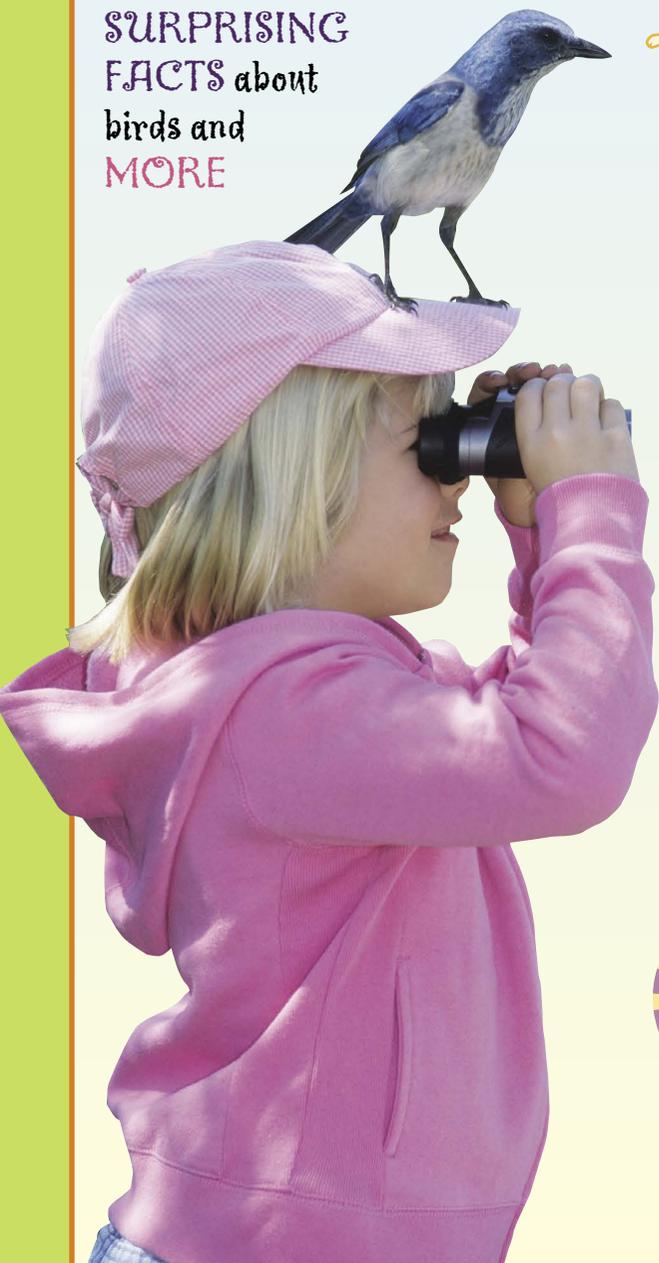


# Bird Brainiac!

**SURPRISING  
FACTS** about  
birds and  
**MORE**



In years past, people might say “Don’t be a birdbrain!” to someone who was being silly. This was because scientists believed that birds’ brains were primitive and that birds acted on instinct.

Now, neuroscientists have discovered that certain birds, such as parrots, have brains that enable them to learn and teach new sounds. Only humans, bats, dolphins, whales, elephants, and some birds have brains that can support these skills.

**So, bird brainiacs,  
fly high with these  
facts.**



ruby-throated hummingbird



Copycat Bird

**Mockingbirds** sing—but not their own song. They copy, or mock, the songs of other birds. Each imitation is repeated two or three times, and then it’s on to another tune. A mockingbird may know 30 to 200 sounds, including other birdsongs, insect and amphibian sounds, and even the sounds of barking dogs, pianos, sirens, or squeaky gates. Often, mockingbirds are such good imitators that electronic analysis can’t tell the imitation from the original.



bee-eater



parrots



black-crowned cranes



barn owl

**CONTINUED**



blue-breasted roller



hoppe

## BEYOND FLOCKS

Group names for things are called **collective nouns**. Here are a few for specific birds:

- charm of hummingbirds
- chattering of chicks
- colony of gulls
- congress of crows
- exaltation of larks
- gulp of cormorants
- mob of emus
- parliament of owls
- stand of flamingos
- unkindness of ravens
- watch of nightingales



## PASSENGER PIGEON PASSINGS

John James Audubon once saw a migration of passenger pigeons so big that it took 3 days to fly over his head. Such flocks would darken the sky, and their colonies, called "pigeon cities," were huge. In 1871, the largest colony ever described covered about two-thirds of the state of Wisconsin.

Over the years, massive hunting and forest-clearing led to the passenger pigeons' extinction. The last known one, **Martha**, named after Martha Washington, died in 1914 in the Cincinnati Zoo.



## QUIRKY KIWI

New Zealand's national bird, the **kiwi**, is different from most birds:

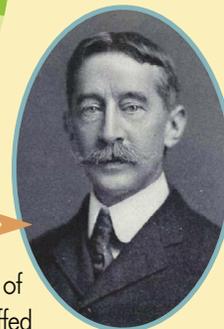
- Its feathers look like hair.
- It is the only bird that has nostrils at the end of its beak.
- It hatches from an enormous egg and is born fully feathered and able to live for a time on a large reserve of yolk in its belly.



ostrich



egret



## An Original BIRD MAN

In the late 1800s, ladies wore hats decorated with the long plumes of egrets, ostriches, herons, owls, and other birds—and even with stuffed wild birds themselves. Thousands of birds were being killed for these decorations.

**George Grinnell** hated the hats and loved birds. (In fact, his middle name was "Bird"!)

In 1886, he founded the Audubon Society to try to stop this destruction of birds. He named the society for naturalist John James Audubon, who in 1840 had published the book *Birds of America*, which featured 435 life-size prints of bird paintings that he had done.

Today, the Audubon Society is a national organization dedicated to studying and protecting birds and their habitats.

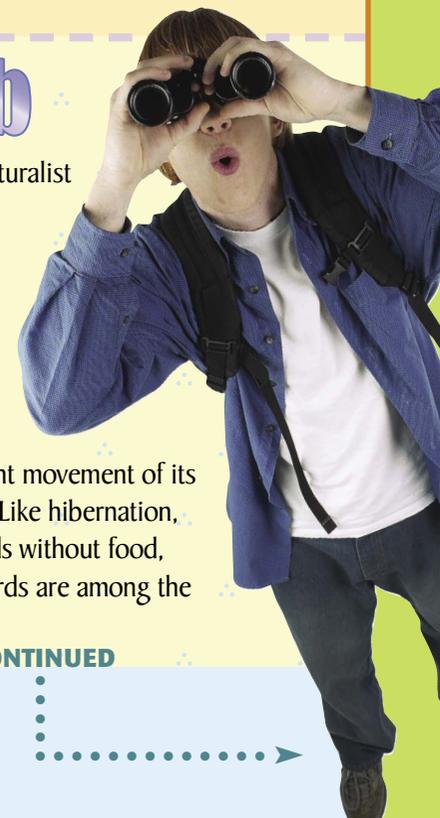
## Do Not Disturb



In **November 1946**, naturalist Edmund C. Jaeger was hiking in California's Chuckwalla Mountains when he noticed a small bird in a hole in

a boulder. He recognized it as a **poorwill** (a western cousin of the whippoorwill). The bird appeared to be dead, until Edmund noticed a slight movement of its eyelid. The bird was in a state known as "torpor." Like hibernation, this state allows the poorwill to go for long periods without food, while dropping its body temperature. Hummingbirds are among the few other birds that experience this state.

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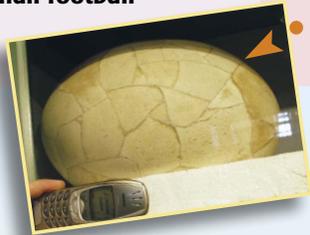
scarlet ibis



cape white-eye

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Largest bird eggs:** ostrich eggs, which weigh about 3 pounds and are the size of a small football



**Biggest bird egg ever:** the 27-pound egg of the now extinct, 10-foot-tall, flightless elephant bird of Madagascar

**Smallest bird eggs:** hummingbird eggs, about the size of a pea or small jelly bean

## NEAT NESTS



- **Osprey nests** are made of anything they can find—even bottles, fishnets, old rubber boots, and tin cans.
- **Bald eagles** enlarge their nests annually. The largest on record was 9½ feet wide and weighed over 2 tons!
- Made from spider silk and thistle down, **hummingbird nests** are about 1½ inches wide.
- **Cave swiftlets** of Southeast Asia build nests entirely out of their own saliva, which hardens when exposed to air. People collect saliva nests and sell them to restaurants, which clean them and use them for “bird’s-nest soup,” an expensive delicacy. (Some restaurants use noodles shaped like a bird’s nest instead.)



## HELP BIRDS BUILD NESTS!



barn swallows

Put some of these things outside:



- yarn or string cut into 4- to 8-inch pieces



- human hair or horsehair, 4 to 6 inches long



- pet fur (that hasn't had flea or tick treatments)



- sheep's wool

- strips of cloth, about 1 inch wide by 6 inches long

If you find a nest, make sure that it's abandoned and then take a closer look. Use tweezers to “dissect” it.



## TOP SPOTTER

**Phoebe Snetsinger** of Missouri started birdwatching in 1965 and eventually set a world record by spotting about 8,400 bird species in her lifetime. She died on a birding trip to Madagascar in 1999, shortly after sighting a rare bird called a **helmet vanga**.



black-shouldered kite



Why do seagulls live by the sea?



Because if they lived by the bay, they'd be BAGELS.