

Bird World

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Did you know that there are more than 8,000 kinds of bird around the world? Most of them can fly, but not all of them. Almost all of them can walk, hop or run, and some can swim and dive, too.

The smallest bird in the world is the Cuban bee hummingbird. It's only six centimeters long, and its eggs are just eight millimeters across! The largest bird is the ostrich. It can be two and a half meters tall – that's much bigger than a person. Its eggs are 15 centimeters long. Imagine frying an ostrich egg!

Birds that can't fly

The ostrich may be the biggest bird of all, but it can't fly. Instead, it can run very fast when it has to escape from predators. Other birds that can't fly include emus, penguins and kiwis. Emus can run as fast as ostriches. Penguins have small wings that they use as paddles in the water when they're swimming. Kiwis are small birds that live in New Zealand. They hide in their burrows during the day, and hunt at night. They don't really look like birds because their feathers look like fur and you can't see their tiny wings.



Birds of prey

Birds like eagles, hawks and falcons are called birds of prey. They can fly really well. In fact, they can also hover in the air like helicopters. They do this while watching their prey on the ground. Birds of prey have incredible eyesight, and can spot small animals like mice, voles and rabbits from a great distance.



As well as having great eyesight, birds of prey also have sharp talons on their feet to hold on to their prey, and hooked beaks for eating what they catch. Vultures are also meat-eaters, but they are lazy. Instead of hunting and killing their prey, they just look for animals that are already dead.


Colorful birds

The most colorful birds are tropical birds like parrots, parakeets and macaws. They live in the treetops of tropical forests, and feed on fruits and flowers. There's also a beautiful bird called the 'bird of paradise'. But only the male bird has colorful feathers – the female is rather dull looking. That's so that she doesn't attract enemies while she's taking care of her eggs.

Many birds show their true colors only when they're looking for a friend. Peacocks spread their amazing tail feathers to show off their beauty to female peacocks. Puffins' beaks develop colorful stripes during the spring, but the colors fall off later, rather like a snake losing its skin.

The 'borrower' birds

Some birds don't make their own nests – they borrow the nests of other birds. The most famous borrower is the cuckoo. The female cuckoo finds another nest and takes one egg out before putting her own in its place. When the other bird returns, it doesn't realize



what's happened, and sits on all the eggs to keep them warm until the baby birds are born. But the young cuckoo is very clever! It's born before the other eggs and then pushes them out of the nest, so that it gets all the food. With so much food all to itself, the cuckoo quickly grows much bigger than its 'adopted' parents, who still don't realize what has happened!

The danger of extinction

Over time, some species of birds have disappeared because people have hunted them or destroyed their habitats. This is called extinction. The dodo was a large bird that lived on an island in the Indian Ocean. Sailors hunted it for food. It was easy to catch because it couldn't fly. Dodos became extinct 300 years ago. Another kind of bird that disappeared was the 'passenger' pigeon, which lived in North America. People destroyed the forests where these pigeons lived, and they were extinct by 1915.