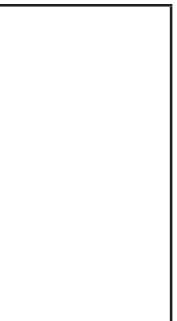


Some Birds of Bhutan

Class III Book 3





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Some Birds of Bhutan

How are birds different from us?

You can find birds everywhere in Bhutan. They live in the roofs of our houses. We can see them in our fields, in the forests, by our rivers, on the mountains and in the towns.

They like to live in places where they can find food and shelter easily. Many birds have their favourite places both in winter and summer.



Look carefully at a bird. You will see that in some ways it is the same as we are and in some ways it is different.



Like us a bird has a head, a neck, a body and two legs. It has a long backbone like mammals, fishes and snakes. It breathes, sees, hears and eats in nearly the same way as we do.



But some things are very different. A bird's body is covered in feathers, not hair . No other animal has feathers. Its backbone ends in a tail. Its arms are changed into wings which end in long feathers.

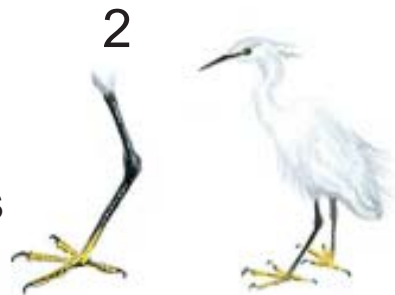


Pick up a bird and weigh it. It is light because its bones are hollow . The next time you see a dead chicken, break one of the leg bones and have a look.

A bird has feet like us but usually only four toes. The toes are hard and sharp and are called claws. Not all birds have the same kind of feet. Look at the pictures below:



A duck's feet (1) help it to swim. The toes are joined with skin.



An egret (2) has long legs so it can stand in water.



A chicken (3) does not usually fly so its legs help it to walk and run.



An eagle (4) has to hold onto small animals with its feet so it has long, strong claws.

Our mouth is soft but birds have a sharp, hard mouth called a beak. If we look at a bird's mouth, we can often know what it eats.

A sparrow (1) has a hard beak to break seeds



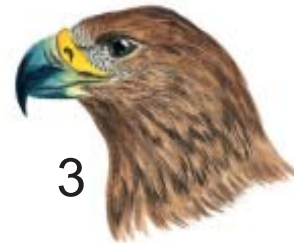
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2

but a swift (2) uses its beak to catch insects.

An eagle (3) has a sharp beak. It has to cut meat



3

4 but a hoopoe (4) needs its long beak to dig for insects in grass and earth.



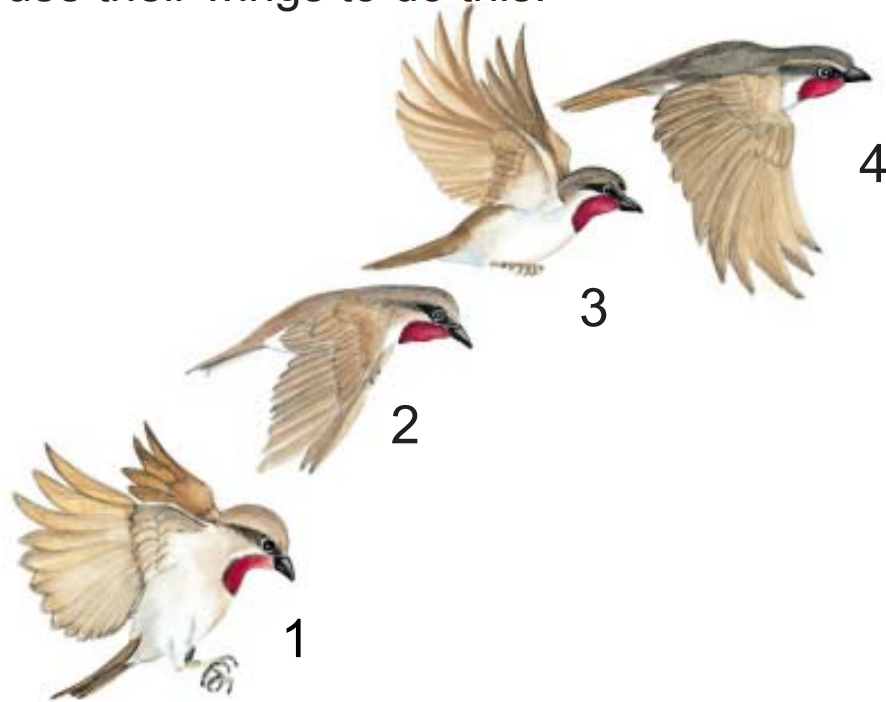
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Most water birds have long beaks. Why is this?



How are birds able to fly?

They use their wings to do this.



1. A bird takes off by jumping into the air and moving its wings up and down.
2. It keeps its feathers close together to push air down and its body up.
3. As the wings rise it opens its feathers to let air go through.
4. The feathers close again as the wings go down.

How do birds bring up their chicks?

Most birds choose a partner in spring. Male birds often sing in the spring so the female can hear them. Many male birds have colourful feathers. They show these to the female birds.



When a male and a female bird make a pair they will build a nest. The female lays eggs in the nest and sits on them to keep them warm.



The baby birds or chicks use their beaks to break open the eggs after about three or four weeks.

The parents will feed the baby birds and look after them. They will only stop feeding them when the young birds can fly, and can find their own food.



The chicken and the duck are domestic animals but all the other birds are wild.

Domestic birds

Chickens



All of us know these birds. We keep them near our houses where they eat left-over food and seeds. The hens lay eggs which we eat.

Not so many of us know that there are wild chickens in Bhutan. They live in forests and in bamboo bushes in the southern part of the country. They look like domestic chickens but are smaller in size.



Ducks

Ducks are fat birds with short legs. The female bird is brown but the male bird has brown, green and blue feathers. Ducks make the sound, “Quack, quack, quack ...”



In many parts of the world people keep ducks for their meat and eggs. In Bhutan we only see them in the south.



Ducks are water birds. They like to live in or near water. Their feet are good for swimming because their toes are joined with skin. Look at the duck's beak. It has a flat beak and uses it to separate food from the water.



Wild birds

Hornbills

Hornbills are big birds that live in dense forests in southern Bhutan. They have very big beaks and a large piece of orange horn on the top of their heads.



In the daytime hornbills sit in pairs on the branches of large leafy fruit trees. They like to eat wild figs. They only go out to fly in the morning and in the evening.

Hornbills make their nests in holes in trees. The female bird goes into the hole and sits on the eggs. The male bird makes a wall of mud to protect her from enemies. He then feeds her and the baby birds through the hole.



Sometimes people kill hornbills because they want oil and meat from them. This is very sad because there are very few of these beautiful birds in the world.

Egrets

Egrets are beautiful white birds that live in southern Bhutan. You can see them in wet paddy fields. They have long legs which help them walk through tall wet grass and swamps. They have long slender beaks which help them find insects for food in the tall trees.





Egrets often ride on the backs of buffaloes and cows. They use their long sharp beaks to catch insects and pick leeches and ticks from the back of these animals.

Egrets like to make their nests on tall trees near villages. We can often find twenty or more nests on a single tree.



Mynahs

There are a lot of mynahs in villages and towns in many of the warmer parts of Bhutan. Like crows they are not frightened of people and will eat anything - left-over food, insects, seeds and fruit. They make nests in holes in houses and walls.





Mynahs like to sing a lot. They like jumping around like small children. The hill mynah, is different. It is a clever bird. It can make many different noises. It can listen to people and copy what they say .



Swifts

Most children will not know a swift. Swifts are small birds, black or brown in colour which fly very fast - faster than any other bird or animal. You sometimes see them flying at great speed around cliffs and trees.



Swifts fly with their beaks open. They can catch small insects and rain drops while flying in the air . They spend nearly all their life in the air and cannot walk well on the ground.



Swifts make small nests on cliffs, trees and tall houses. They stick their nest to the side of the cliff or tree with a glue that their body makes.



Eagles

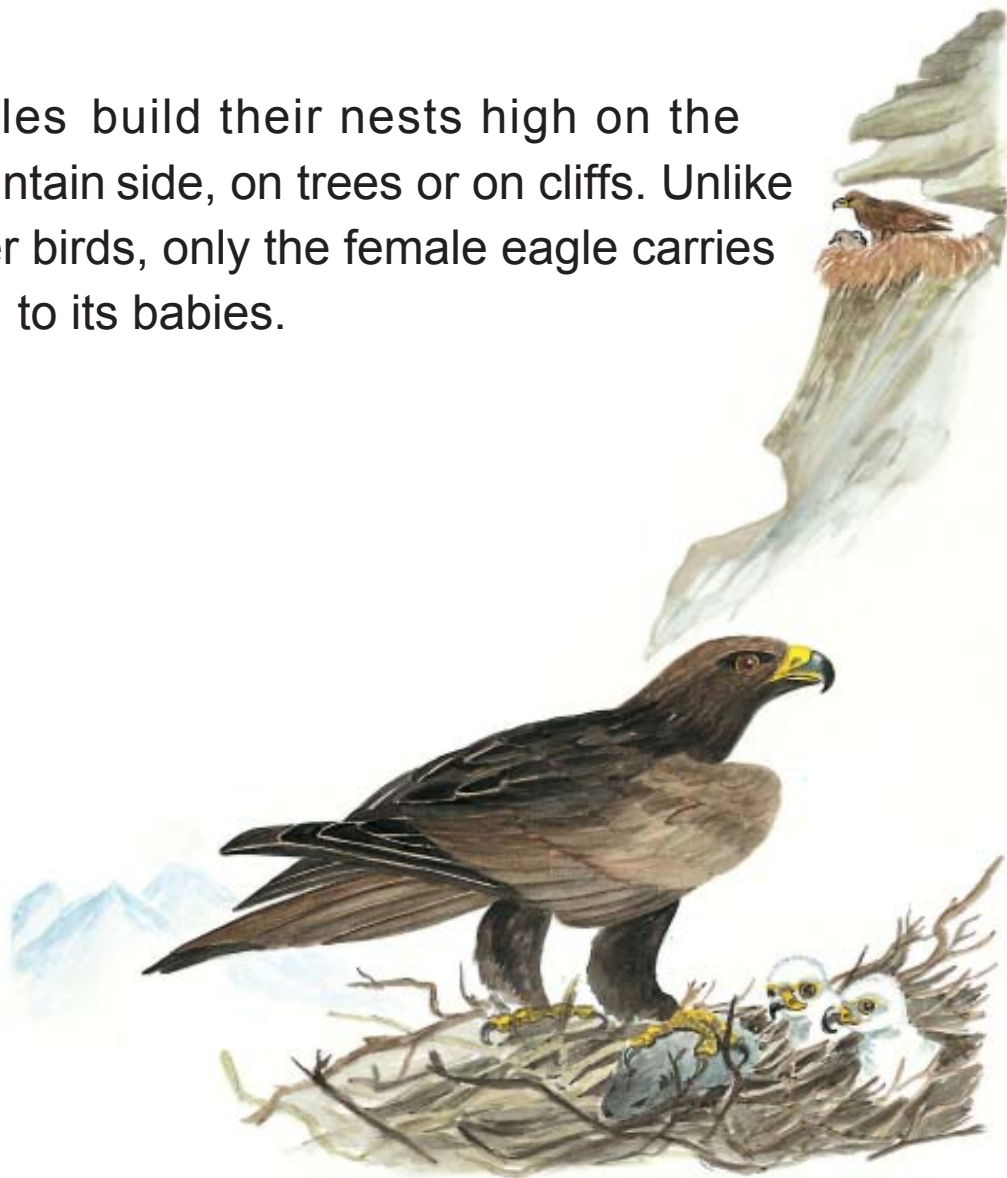


Eagles are big birds which we sometimes see floating slowly in the sky over forests or mountains. They have very good eyesight. They can see small birds and animals on the ground below . When they see them they dive from the sky and grab the animal with their claws. They eat little animals like snakes, rats, rabbits and small monkeys.



Eagles have sharp, strong, curved beaks which can cut meat like a knife. They also have strong feet which can hold and carry small animals.

Eagles build their nests high on the mountain side, on trees or on cliffs. Unlike other birds, only the female eagle carries food to its babies.



Hoopoes



Nearly everyone has seen the hoopoe flying over our fields. It is a beautiful bird with its black and white striped tail, wings and orange body. They have feathers which stand up on its head like a crown. Hoopoes have long beaks which they use to dig insects out from the soft earth, the grass and the holes. Hoopoes like to eat big insects that destroy crops, and so are very useful to farmers.



Hoopoes make their nest in a hole in a wall or an old dead tree trunk. Like many birds they do not like it when people come near their nests. Female hoopoes can produce a bad smell to chase people away .



Hoopoes do not like cold weather. In the winter they fly to southern Bhutan and India. In the spring and when it gets hotter they fly back to north again where they can find more insects in the summer.

Listen to the sound a hoopoe makes? Why do you think it is called a hoopoe?



Sparrows



Sparrows are small brown birds that we find in most parts of Bhutan. They have short, hard beaks which are good for breaking seeds. They are light and can climb rice plants to pluck seeds from the plants. That is why we find sparrows in our rice fields. They like to live near our houses.





Sparrows make nests in holes in walls or roofs. They make them with dry grass and feathers. Often there are many sparrows' nests in one house. They feed their babies with insects and seeds.



Cuckoos

Very few people know what a cuckoo looks like but nearly everyone in northern Bhutan knows the sound it makes in spring, “Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo ...”



Cuckoos look like small pigeons and eat insects. They are useful to farmers as they help them pick up harmful insects like bugs and caterpillars that destroy crops. Like hoopoes they often go to warm places in winter and fly back north in spring.

Cuckoos do not make their own nests. The female cuckoo finds the nest of another small bird like a sparrow. She watches it and when the bird flies away she lays her egg in its nest. Sometimes she removes other bird's eggs so the number of eggs are the same.



When the baby cuckoo comes out of its egg it pushes the other baby birds out of the nest. The sparrow feeds the cuckoo because it thinks it is its baby.



Black-Necked Cranes

The Black-Necked Crane is the largest bird in Bhutan but very few people have seen it. It is nearly as tall as a man and has a long black neck and very long legs. The top of its head is red and it makes loud sound.



Black-Necked Cranes do not make their nests in Bhutan. In the autumn they fly back to the north. They fly with their heads straight in front. In winter they return to Bhutan. They spend the winter in the paddy fields of Phobjikha, Gyet sa and Trashi Yangtse. They eat roots and young plants.



In early spring the cranes look for their partners. Once the female finds a male partner, they stay as partners all their lives. Once they find their partners they celebrate by dancing in pairs. In March they fly back to the north again to Tibet where they spend the summer. There are very few Black-Necked Cranes in the world and are protected birds in Bhutan.



Ravens



Ravens are large black birds which live in the high mountains near Tibet. They are in the same family as the black crow which you often see in all parts of Bhutan. The raven looks like a crow, but is bigger in size and have longer feathers on its neck.



Crows and ravens have strong beaks which they use to eat nearly anything - seeds, vegetables, fruits and meat. They often eat the bodies of dead animals. They are clever birds and are not frightened of people. There are many stories about them taking things from people.



The raven is our national bird. Our king has a raven on his crown. Pel Yeshey Gonpo, the guardian deity of Bhutan is believed to have come in the form of a raven.



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