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6 Church Green, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 4AW

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Created and produced by Julia Bruce, Rachel Coombs,
Nicholas Harris, Sarah Hartley, Katie Sexton and Erica Williams,
Orpheus Books Ltd.

Text by Olivia Brookes

Illustrated by Ian Jackson (*The Art Agency*),
Martin Camm, Jim Channell, Malcolm Ellis, Betti Ferrero,
Sauro Giampaia, Eric Robson and David Wright

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see how we live

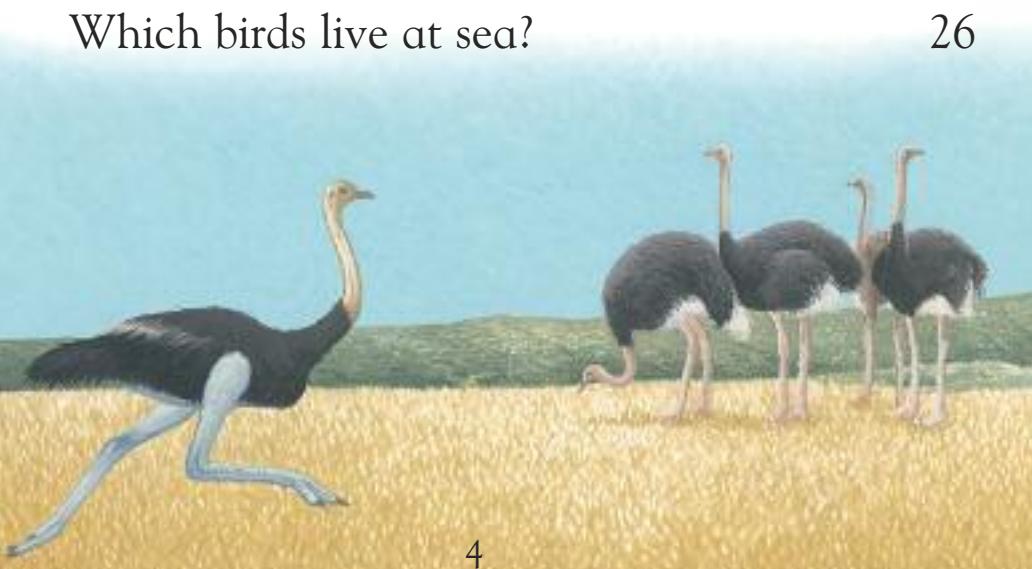
Birds



¶ Orpheus

Contents

How do birds fly?	6
How far can birds fly?	10
How fast can an ostrich run?	12
How does a bird attract a mate?	14
Where do birds make their nests?	22
Which birds live at sea?	26



Birds

Eagles, penguins, ostriches, seagulls, parrots, pigeons ... we are all birds. We are the only animals that have feathers. They keep us warm and dry. We all have a pair of feathery wings, two legs, a beak and claws. Most, but not all, of us can fly. Everything else about us is different.

How do birds fly?

We flying birds have smooth, light bodies and long, stiff flight feathers to lift us up and help us glide through the air.



We beat our wings up and down to push ourselves upwards and forwards.



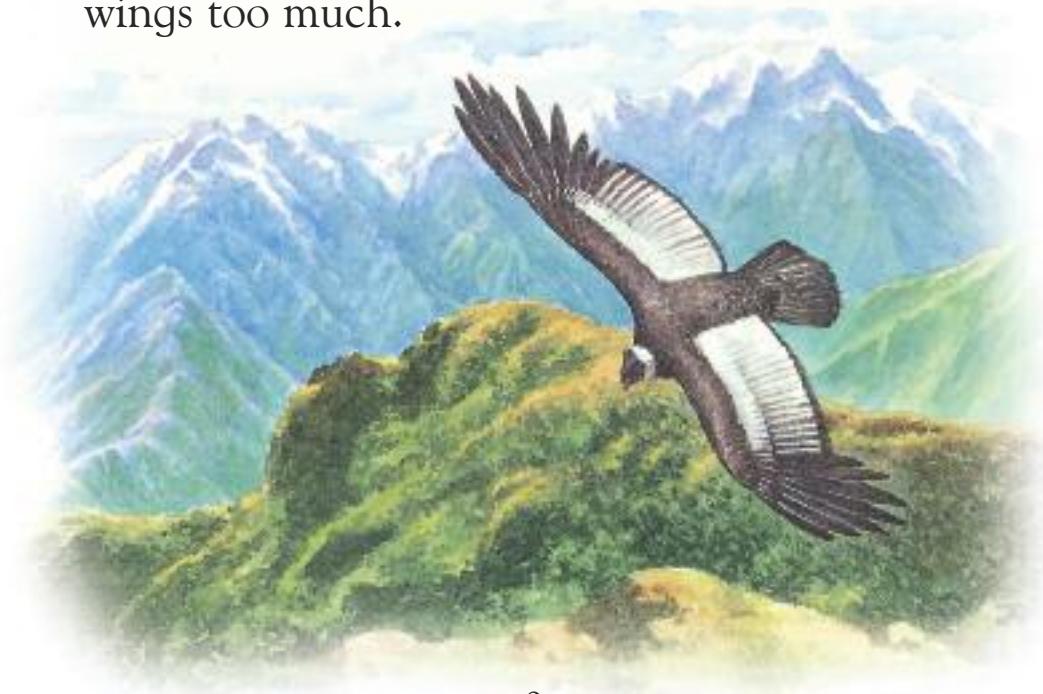
Our tails help us to steer and brake. Flying makes us tired, so we have to eat a lot of food to give us energy. We use up twice as much energy as other animals on the ground.





Because I am so small, I have to beat my wings much faster than other birds—sometimes 80 times a second! My wings beat so fast they make a humming sound. That's why I'm called a hummingbird.

A condor like me takes long, slow, but very powerful strokes. I can even hold my wings still and glide. That way I can relax a bit while I look for a meal. Sometimes I'm so relaxed I even fall asleep in the air! I can travel great distances without flapping my wings too much.





How far can birds fly?

Many birds fly a long way when they migrate, but I, the Arctic tern, am the distance champion! I breed during the Arctic summer, then fly 13,000 kilometres to Antarctica, to feed. It's summer there too.

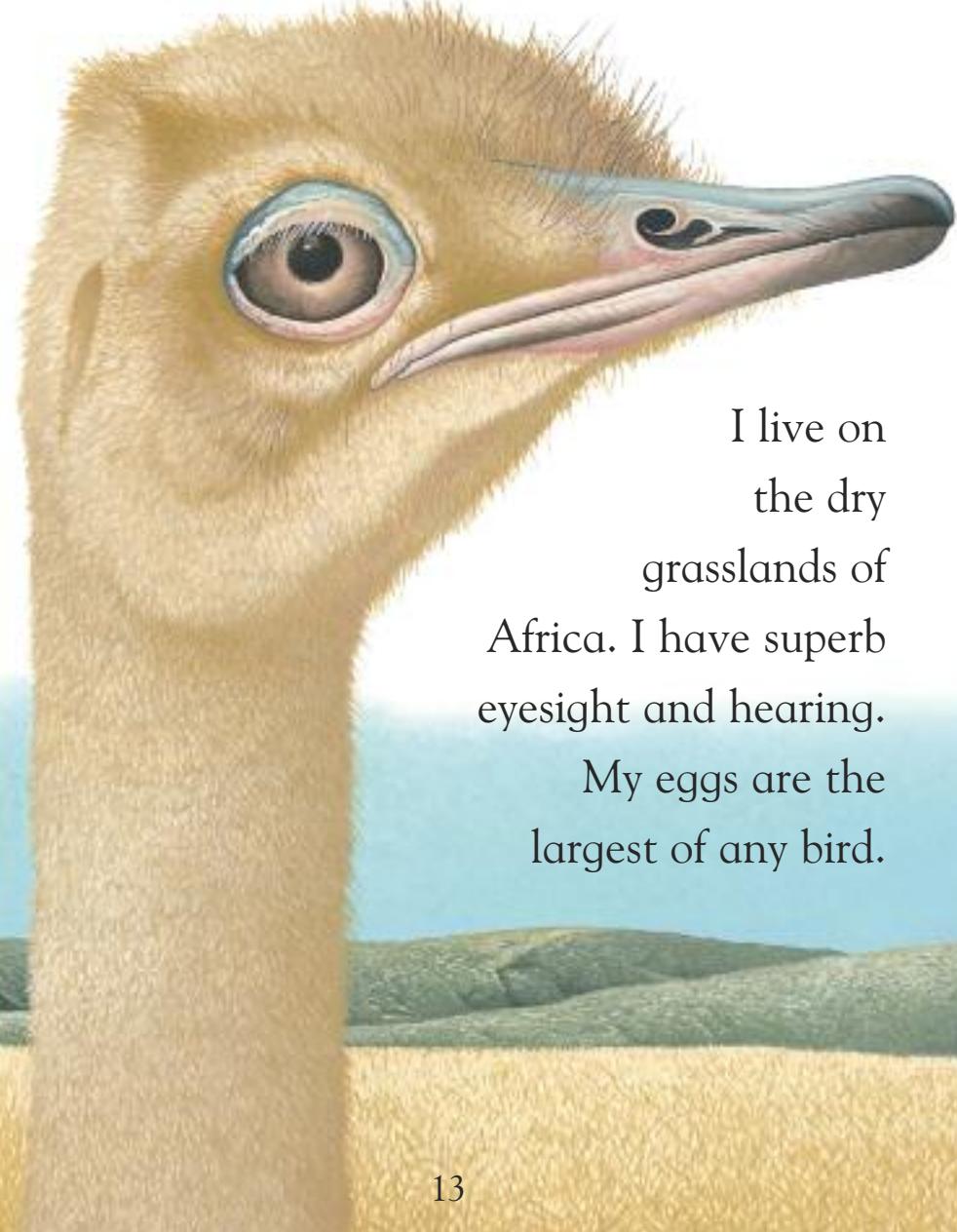
I fly all the way from Siberia to southern Africa. I'm a willow warbler. There's very little to eat in deserts, so I have to stock up before I fly over them.



We slender-billed shearwaters nest on islands off Australia, then set off on a seven-month journey around the Pacific Ocean.

How fast can an ostrich run?

I am, without doubt, the fastest thing on two legs. I can leave you humans gasping well behind: my top speed is 70 kilometres per hour! I use my powerful legs and two-toed feet to run away from predators, such as lions. I usually get a head start, as I can often spot them from far away.



I live on
the dry
grasslands of
Africa. I have superb
eyesight and hearing.

My eggs are the
largest of any bird.

How does a bird attract a mate?

The most important thing an animals has to do is produce young. First, we have to find a mate. In the bird world, it's males who need to attract females—and keep other males away. We peacocks do this in spectacular fashion by fanning out our tail feathers. Who could resist those eyes?





How about these feathers, then? During the mating season, we male red-plumed birds of paradise gather on high branches. We hop about, quiver our wings and lean forward to spread our beautiful red plumage above our heads. There are many different kinds of birds of paradise, all living in or near New Guinea. We all have different displays.

This is me, a sage grouse, trying to impress females. I fan out my tail feathers, puff up my chest and make loud, cracking noises.



Red-crowned cranes mate for life, so we do a special dance to make sure our partner is the right one. We swing from side to side, bow, and bounce into the air.

Talking of courtship dances,
watch this! We bald eagles
do ours in mid-air, whirling and
somersaulting high above ground.

We sometimes
lock talons as
we tumble and
dive ...

... then we plummet towards
the ground, pulling out of
the fall with only
seconds to spare.



Where do birds make their nests?



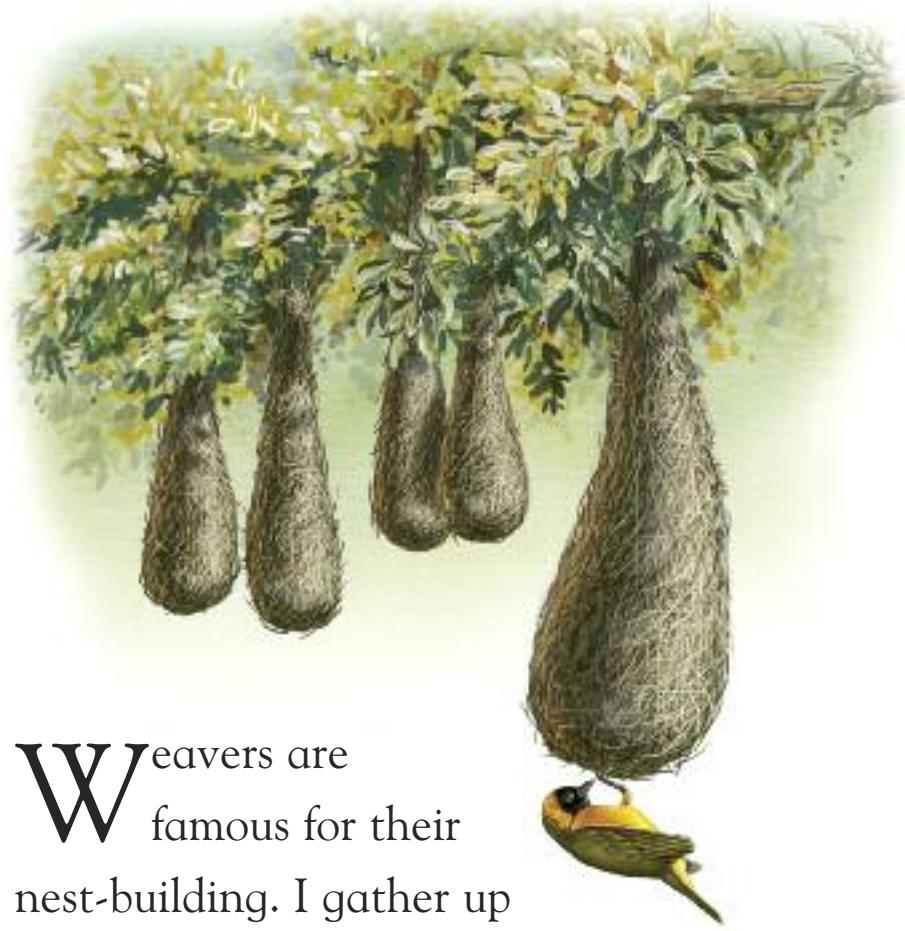
We build nests to protect our eggs and our young from predators. They are usually hidden away or out of reach. Even a big, powerful predator like me, a golden eagle, builds a nest away from trouble on a high rock ledge. I feed my hatchlings on worms or scraps of meat.



Is there a better place for a water bird's nest than in the middle of a stream? We grebes build floating nests.



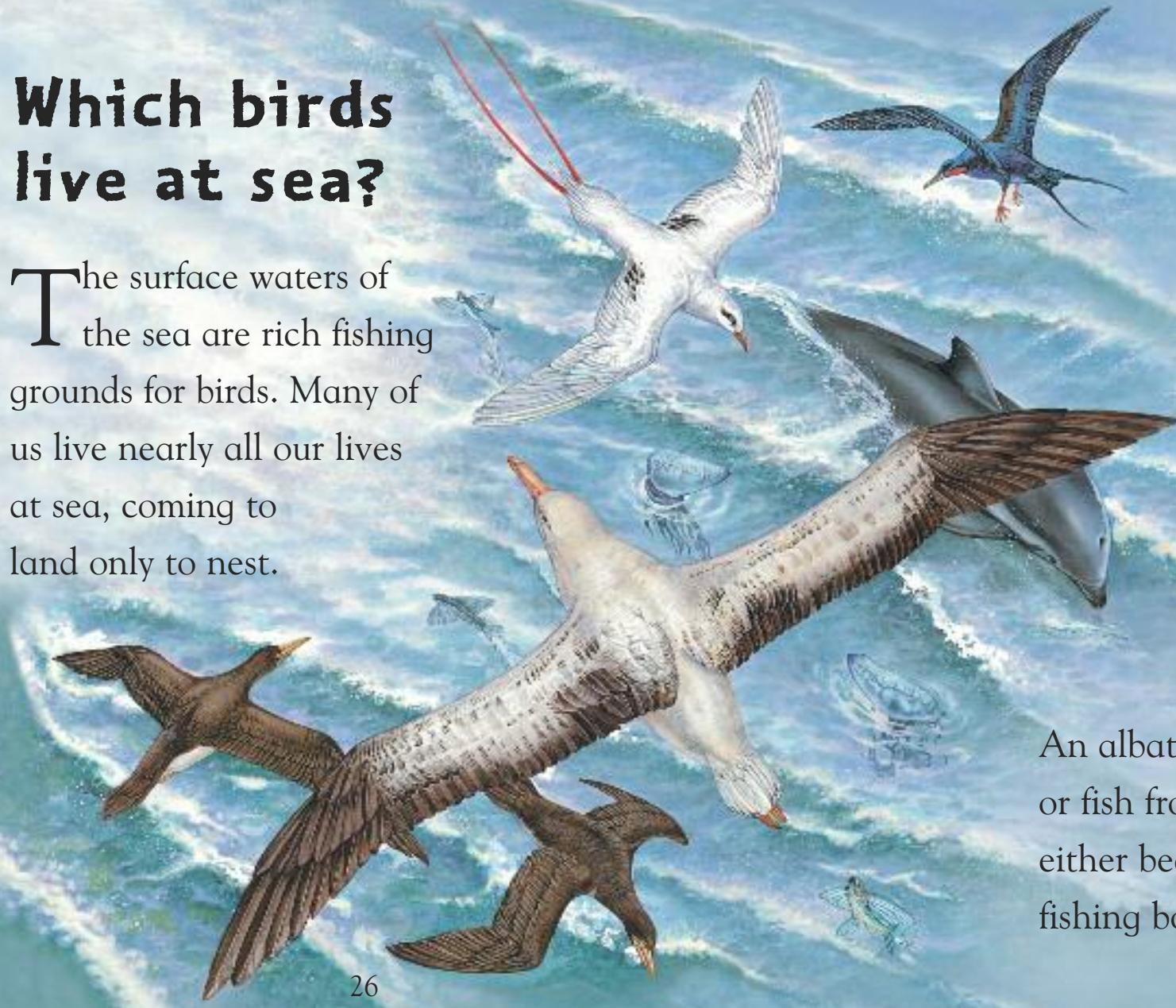
We tailorbirds make our nests between the edges of leaves sewn together. We use plant fibres or even spider's webs for the threads.



Weavers are famous for their nest-building. I gather up strips of leaves and weave them together to make a deep pouch. The finished nest hangs from a branch.

Which birds live at sea?

The surface waters of the sea are rich fishing grounds for birds. Many of us live nearly all our lives at sea, coming to land only to nest.



Both the tropic bird (with the long, red tail feathers) and brown booby plunge into the water. I, a wily frigate-bird, wait for another bird to make a catch, then I chase it until it drops its catch. Then I claim my prize!

An albatross like me snatches squid or fish from the water's surface with either beak or claws. I also follow fishing boats for an easy catch.

The seashore is also a good place to find a meal. You'll always see plenty of us birds on rocky shores or wading through mudflats. We oystercatchers have long, straight, orange beaks. We use them to probe through sand, seaweed and rockpools in search of food. When we find a tasty cockle or mussel, our beaks are very good at splitting them open.

There are always plenty of gulls around. We'll eat pretty well anything we find: fish, small mammals—even tasty things you humans leave behind.

