

Bird Mysteries, Myths, Mistruths

Applying the imaginative powers of the human mind to complicated subjects such as those in nature, may result in far ranging conclusions from mysteries to myths and mistruths. Man has always been fascinated by birds and their ability to fly, their beauty and ability to do unbelievable things, such as migrate over exceedingly long distances. Over many eons of time, man has often translated his observations in nature to conform to his limited understanding of what is happening in the world around him.

Birds having the navigation skills to migrate thousands of miles repeatedly to the same destination end points is a difficult concept for even the most learned scientists to understand. That a Black-chinned Hummingbird that hatched in a neighborhood in Kerrville, Texas can fly south in August to a spot in Panama or another country in the tropics and return to the same backyard in Kerrville in March is difficult to comprehend. Scientists may never fully understand how this tiny bird can accomplish such a feat annually. This situation falls into the mystery category.

Since we have a hard time believing such a phenomenon to be possible, someone with a very imaginative mind has rationalized that these tiny birds must have had some help to fly such long distances. One such imaginative person observes a flock of Canada Geese flying south overhead in a nice "V" formation, and the wheels in his mind begin to grind. Could it be that small birds that travel long distances might "piggyback" rides on the backs of these strong flying geese? He tells a friend about his theory and the friend tells another friend; a belief forms that small birds, like hummingbirds, travel on the backs of geese to save energy.

After several generations of the story being told many times its being proved untrue, the myth is accepted as fact. However, as an observer of nature for so many years, I have come to the conclusion that tiny bird hitchhikers are just fantasy. I have never read or heard about any goose hunter reporting finding hummingbirds in the down on geese backs. It makes a good story, but no evidence supports it. Now if I indulge my imagination I can think of tiny bucket seats on the geese backs and the myth grows.

The Native Americans developed the mythical "Thunderbird" that could flap its wings and make the sound of thunder and flash lightning out of its eyes. This myth may have started because hawks and birds of prey are often seen in front of late summer storms wind surfing southward ahead of the storms. Over hundreds of years of storytelling, the Thunderbird developed a legendary life of his own. The mighty "Roc" bird of India was thought to have a wingspan of more than 100 feet and could carry an elephant. As humans observe what is dramatic and strange and ponder possibilities, myths continue to develop.

Mistruths can be deliberate. Exaggerations are used to advance fear or some idea for gain. There is a video of a Golden Eagle swooping down from the skies in Canada, snatching a child, and flying away. Unfortunately in our time people can “photo-shop” photos and videos to produce lifelike illusions to mislead people. That a full-grown eagle can only lift an object weighing less than four pounds should stop the mistruth of such a video. Unfortunately, these mistruths lead to false belief that eagles are predators of small children, and bring on a wrath of reprisals.

I hope I did not spoil any of my readers' beliefs that hummingbirds do ride on the backs of geese. If any reader can furnish evidence of this myth that has not been photo-shopped, I will write another column retracting my story. I will be very suspicious of a photo of a tiny bucket seat attached to goose feathers. For the rest of my readers, enjoy all of the historical myths, as I do, and let your imagination get involved – it's fun.

Go outside & play!

Article by Bill Lindemann, FBG, TX