

BENEFITS & VALUES OF BIRDS & BIRDS WATCHING



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Birds have affected man, and man has affected birds, for countless thousands of years. The Stone Age cave drawings of birds in France, Spain, Africa, and elsewhere reveal that man was interested in birds at least 22 thousand years ago.

INTEREST

Man's original interest in birds centered on their food value, their apparently magical powers of flight, their mysterious appearance and disappearance in migratory movements, their bright colors, striking behavior, and intriguing songs.

MYTHS

Some tribes have believed that men's souls reside in birds, and that when a specific bird dies, its individual human counterpart also dies.

In the *Golden Bough* Frazer (1922) related numerous instances in which primitive people ate birds or parts of birds not for nourishment but as one of the rites of homeopathic or sympathetic magic.

Japanese Ainu believed that if one ate the still-warm heart of a freshly killed water ouzel, he would become wise and fluent.

Primitive people of northern India believed that eating the eye ball of an owl would give one the ability, like an owl,

to see in the dark.

Certain tribes in Morocco would not eat the heart of a chicken for fear that it would make them timid, in certain Turkish tribes, children who were slow in learning to speak were fed the tongues of birds. Europeans believe that owls bring goodluck whereas Arabs think that the same birds are a sign of badluck or death.

FOOD & PRODUCTS FROM BIRDS

- Billions of domesticated birds like chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, pheasants, guineafowl, quails, and partridges are annually raised for their eggs and meat.
- In New Guinea and Australia, Emus and Cassowaries are also raised for their meat.
- Hundreds of thousands of ostriches are raised each year in southern Africa for their ornamental plumes.
- Feathers are also used for making arrows or to strengthen clay pots.
- About 25000 ostriches are raised annually as a source of leather.
- Loons are used to make skin bags.
- Feathered-skin of many birds is used for clothing.
- Feather-filled articles include snow pants, parkas, pillows, blankets, and other types of bedding and clothing.
- Swan bone is used to make drinking tube.
- Rattles are made from the crop of grouses.
- Dusters are made from goose wings.
- Primitive tribes in all parts of the world use the colorful feathers of birds for personal adornment, religious, or magical rites, and even as material for decorating ladies and men hats.
- Iceland today exports annually about 4000kg of down from the nests of Eider Ducks for pillows and mattresses.
- Large quills were once widely used for writing, and feathers have long been used on fishing lures.
- Large feathers have often been used in fans



- In Southern America, cormorants, boobies, pelicans, and other birds drop between 200000 and 300000 metric tons of dry guano (manure) per year.
- Tasmanians used the stomach oil of Shearwater birds as a beverage, a medicine (rich in vitamins), as lubricant, and as fuel for lamps.
- Body fat from birds was used by South Americans for cooking or as oil in lamps.
- The edible nest of cave swift let's has long been highly prized as the chief ingredient of Chinese bird-nest soup and other gourmet delicacies.
- Twenty to thirty tons of the nests, largely composed of mucilaginous protein from the birds' salivary glands, are exported from Borneo and other Indio Malaysian islands each year.
- The ivory from the upper-mandible casqued of the Helmeted Hornbill of Borneo and Malaysia has been exported for centuries to China where it has been carved into small figurines and other ornaments.
- Bird bones are a source of beads. After being soaked or immersed in the dye, beads are used in necklaces and earrings and are sewed on headbands, coats, and other clothing.
- Different kinds of whistles are made from bird bones. The sound of the whistle varies with the kind of bird and bone used, the size of the bone, and the number of

- holes made along the length of the bone.
- Split wing bones of various birds have served as toothpicks.

OTHER ECONOMICAL ASPECTS OF BIRDS

- Birds are foretellers the weather, the coming offish and the good or bad luck.
- Birds are kept as pets.
- Falcons, hawks, eagles and even owls are used as a tool for hunting sport.
- Geese are used as night dog guards and as grass cutting machine.

MEDICINAL USES OF BIRDS

- Fresh raw or rotten bird meat has been secured on an infected or blood-poisoned area to draw the sickness from the area into the meat.
- Any kind of soup including duck, grouse, and ptarmigan can be given to a sick person to increase his appetite and provide nourishment.
- A flue virus isolated from canaries was used to mitigate the effects of Aids.

- From watching swift behaviour, man discovered a new herb which was effectively used for muscle relaxation of ladies at the time of delivery.
- The experimental study of bird malaria has contributed to a better understanding of human malaria.
- The pharmaceutical manufacture of vaccines to yellow fever and small pox is accomplished through the inoculation of hen's eggs undergoing incubation.

BIRD BENEFITS FOR PLANTS

- Many birds, especially nectar birds (Sun bird in Lebanon, Humming bird) play a significant role in flowering trees and shrub pollination.
- Birds are undeniably of great economic benefit to man through their insatiable appetites for insects, rodents and other organisms that are harmful to agricultural crops.
- Rose-colored Starling, *Sturnus roseus*, immigrates to follow outbreaks of locusts on which it largely feeds
- Starlings and tick birds relieve cattle and wild animals of their ticks and other vermin.
- Birds help preventing the spread of tree diseases by eaten insects and larvae even from under barks.
- Seeds that pass through a bird's digestive tract

germinate more freely than those that come directly from the plant.

AVITOURISM (BIRDING/BIRDWATCHING)

- 21/10/03- A federal economic report found that 46 million birdwatchers across America spent \$32 billion in 2001 pursuing one of the Nation's most popular outdoor activities according to a report from the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- At Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, birdwatchers spent \$14.4 million in the local communities: \$6.16 million on lodging, \$2.18 million on meals, \$0.44 million on fuel, and \$5.64 million on other purchases. The average visitor contributed between \$88 and \$145 to the local economy (Eubanks et al. 1995).
- The longest bird watching trail in the world is more than 750 kms. It is constructed in Texas and funded with 1.5 million dollars. Texas alone has more birds than most other states, with more than 400 species possible during the year.
- Members of the Royal Society for Bird Preservation in England exceed 1 million persons.



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