Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

How The Birds Got A King

Theo van Hoytema

A long, long time ago people could understand birds. Nowadays, it’s totally different. Who understands any of the screeching and chirping? Of course, it’s beautiful when a bird sings its song, but we no longer understand them. We used to.

Free and happy, the birds flew around and if they ever got into a fight, it was quickly resolved. A better life you couldn’t imagine. But when life is good, often it’s not appreciated, and you want it to be even better. That’s why the cuckoo suddenly had the idea that birds, just like people, needed a king and proposed this to the other birds.

A couple of pigeons quietly listened to him. A crow nodded in agreement. Some ducks quaked their approval. A stork and a heron already thought that they were king. And all the others agreed with the cuckoo as well. Only the peewit didn’t want to hear about it. He had always lived and roamed free. And free is how he wanted to die. Scared he flew back and forth and yelled: ‘I’m going to lose it! I’m going to lose it!’ And he was never seen again.



The proposal was accepted, but who was going to be king ‘A big one or a little one? A pretty one or an ugly one? With tall or short legs?’ It was a complicated situation. Many speakers spoke about it. Posh storks, excited crows, annoying geese and graceful nightingales. There was one bird without a name who never got the chance to speak, because everyone was listening to the screamers.

When the nightingale proposed: ‘The one that can fly the highest, shall be king!’, all birds erupted in cheering. A frog that was sitting in the grass smelled trouble and said: ‘I foresee a dark future and I’m afraid many tears will fall.’ But the birds didn’t listen and the next morning the match began. All birds came to an open spot and flew up on the starting sign.

The small birds quickly fell behind and fell to the ground one by one, exhausted. The bigger birds lasted longer, but nobody could fly as high as the eagle. The eagle flew so high, that it seemed as if it could say hello to the sun. When he

saw that the other birds couldn’t fly so high, he thought: ‘Why would I fly any higher? I am the king.’ And he gracefully soared down.



All the birds yelled to him from the ground: ‘You’re the king! Nobody has flown higher.’ Except for a little bird with no name that had hidden between the eagle's wings ‘I am here too.’ And because he wasn’t tired at all, this bird flew even higher than the eagle, dropped himself down and yelled: ‘The king, am I! The king, am I!’

‘You, our king?!’ ‘By trickery and deceit you flew so high.’ And in their anger the birds made a different ruling. ‘The one that can poke the deepest in the ground, should be king.’ A rooster started digging furiously. A stork wanted nothing to do with it. Partridges and pheasants started digging too. A duck jumped in the water to get away from all the ruckus.

The little bird without a name looked for a mouse hole, crawled into it and started screaming: ‘The king, am I! The king, am I!’ Immediately all the birds flocked to him and yelled: ‘Do you think we will fall for your trickery? We will teach you a lesson!’ They decided to trap the bird in the mouse hole and starve it to death.

An owl was appointed as guard. The night fell and the birds went to sleep exhausted. The owl was the only one left and was looking at the mouse hole with his big eyes. During the night the owl became tired and thought: ‘I can close one eye… The other can keep watch.’ So he did. After a while the other eye closed and the owl opened the other eye again. He was planning to switch between his eyes all night, but at some point both eyes fell shut.

The little bird noticed this and snuck out of the hole. The next morning all the other birds got really angry at the poor owl. Since then owls are too scared to show themselves during the day. Only at night they fly and take revenge on mice because their little hole gave them all this trouble.

Also the bird with no name doesn’t show anymore. He sneaks around in winter around hedges and bushes when there are no other birds around and yells” ‘The king, am I! The king, am I!’ That is the reason that that bird nowadays is called ‘Winter King’.

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.