



Winged Migration Discussion Guide

Directors: Jacques Perrin, Jacques Cluzaud, Michel Debats
Year: 2001
Time: 89 min

You might know these directors from:

Jacques Perrin, Jacques Cluzaud: Oceans (2009),
Microcosmos (1996)
Michel Debats: Himalaya (1999)

FILM SUMMARY

Birds. Those winged creatures occupying the expanse above us. A place of dreams, escape, a heavenly consideration that bridges cultural and geographical boundaries. By using the skies as a filmic backdrop, WINGED MIGRATION offers us an opportunity to become birdlike for an atmospheric 90 minutes.

Joining flocks of everything from Canada geese to African white pelicans, soaring high up above the soil and concrete of daily human existence, five teams of cinematographers in 40 countries filmed over the course of three years in order to collect the footage for WINGED MIGRATION. From below, above, beside, in front of, and behind migrating birds, the cameras elevate us above our everyday terrain and capture the migratory trails of birds on all seven continents, as they obey their animal instinct and persist in the drive to survive.

Seen from a bird's-eye view, monuments such as the Eiffel Tower and Statue of Liberty appear diminished, passing fancies on the long-haul journey from Pole to Pole. Seamless editing and an otherworldly score place the focus on the skies, and even the majestic Grand Canyon and Himalayas become brief decor, landmarks to soar above on the way to the hope and promise of abundant resources. Rising up above the human territory, WINGED MIGRATION offers a diminutive perspective on the world we hold so dear, the constructs in which we place such value. To the birds, the human ground is something to traverse in the hunt for survival. Touching down to refuel, to maintain the precious balance between predator and prey, insect and vegetation, our aerial counterparts display athletic prowess and unsurpassable endurance. WINGED MIGRATION offers a unique opportunity to take flight in our own imaginations, to soar alongside our feathered friends. By joining the birds, we are granted open access to the hardships they face and miles they cover, while being offered a new height from which to contemplate our ground-bound existence.

FILM THEMES

THE WILL TO SURVIVE

Birds take to the skies twice a year, once to fly south to the promise of food when winter threatens, and then back north when the cold abates and protein-rich food sources are available once again. Migration is no holiday time, no option for the pleasure seeker. Migration is a fight for life, the outcome of life's demand for a constant source of reliable sustenance. And deep within the nervous system of each species that embarks on a migratory trail - from the rockhopper penguin to the bald eagle - resounds the call of nature. Life wants to live. No matter what obstacles may surface on the journey, what iron strength may be required to cross an ocean in a single flight, what dangers may be present, the will of nature is rock solid. Instinct is intense, as displayed by the millions of birds that take to the skies twice annually, responding to the internal alarm call with action, endurance, and perseverance.

INTERNAL COMPASS

Imagine traveling 9,000 miles for the promise of a six-month supply of food. Not in a car or on an airplane or on a cruise ship, but using the energy available in your body and your body alone to take you there. Such is the life of a bird. Now imagine traversing that distance without a single map, no red flag in front of you waving the way ahead. With nothing more than the Sun, the stars, and the Earth's magnetic field, birds travel incredible cross-global distances in their fight for life. As we gawk in disbelief at the sheer length and breadth, an internal compass leads the way, something a bird remains connected to lest it should lose its way and its chance at survival. A migrating bird relies on its avian instinct, and life is equated with the capacity to reach the end of the journey, something made possible through that internal mechanism.

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Ah, to fly. So majestic, so super-human. At times in the film, the "no special effects" disclaimer seems hard to believe. Peering down at the human world from up high, a perspective we are rarely granted, has such transformative capacity. The story told in the sky, the swooping movements and graceful soaring, touch a rarely hit nerve in the human psyche. We are surrounded by birds on a daily basis, no matter where we live, and yet we know so little of the lives they live. They come to us, perching on porches, sitting on windowsills, singing in public parks. Given the chance to wing it in the high-up altitudes with them and to look down on our world opens the mind to otherwise inaccessible expanses.

THREATS

The life of a bird is dominated by the endless search for food. Migration is a high-level expression of this hunt, when resources become low and seasons begin shifting. Threats, however, exist in many varying degrees and levels for bird life. From dwindling habitats caused by human involvement, to animal predators constantly lurking nearby, to pollution, weather, hunters, injury, and disease, the life of a bird is chock-full of dangers. The world threatens from all angles, and birds continue in their endless, incessant fight for survival.

“The story of migrating birds is the story of a promise: the promise to return. They fly, often thousands of miles, beset with danger, for a single reason: to survive.”

Film narrator

“What if we understood that our borders did not exist, that the earth is a one and only space, and what if we learned to be as free as birds?”

Director Jacques Perrin

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. What was the most spectacular aspect of WINGED MIGRATION? Is there a certain scene that stands out in your mind?
2. How much did you know about bird migration before watching the film? How much did the film educate you on migration?
3. How often are you aware of bird life in your community? Do birds visit your garden, yard, balcony, windowsill, etc.?
4. Do you have a strong internal compass? Are you able to navigate well without the use of maps? Would you make a good migrator?
5. Birds migrate as a matter of survival. Is there anything comparable in the human world?
6. Are you fascinated by or fearful of flying? Have you ever partaken in parachuting, skydiving, or any other form of "human flying?"
7. Do you feel that WINGED MIGRATION, and other such nature films, serve a valuable purpose in educating humans? Or through their filming process, do they impose upon and harm wildlife?
8. Name five ways in which birds and humans are similar and five ways in which we are different.
9. Do you feel that birds should be kept caged in zoos and as pets? How can birds benefit from being domesticated?
10. Did WINGED MIGRATION change your perspective on the world in which you live? If so, how?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- WINGED MIGRATION was granted a number of prestigious awards, including Best Cinematography from the Boston Society of Film Critics, Best Sound Editing in Foreign Features from the Motion Pictures Sound Editors Awards, and Best Documentary from the New York Film Critics Online Awards. In addition, the film was nominated for many awards, including an Oscar, Best Documentary at the European Film Awards, and Best Cinematography at the Chicago Film Critics Association Awards.
- Five cinematography teams shot footage for the film over the course of three years, on all seven continents. A variety of different aircraft were used to film the birds, including traditional gliders, remote-controlled models, the Delta plane, and balloons.
- As the film was made by a team of French directors and producers, WINGED MIGRATION was originally released as “Le Peuple Migrateur.” In Australia, it was released as “The Travelling Birds: An Adventure in Flight.”
- Director Jacques Perrin began his film career as an actor, and has appeared in over 100 films. Perrin produced and acted in the film “Z,” which was awarded an Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1969. His more recent ventures include producing and directing nature and animal films.
- The film’s soundtrack includes a Bulgarian vocal group, Nick Cave, and Robert Wyatt.
- Most migrating birds follow a north-south axis in their travels, which can be divided into four main axes: North American birds travel south to the southern U.S. and South America; European and Asian birds travel towards Africa, crossing the Mediterranean Sea or the Middle East; Asian birds travel to India around the Himalayas; and Southeast Asian birds travel as far as Australia and the Pacific Ocean.
- Before embarking on their long migrations, birds enter into hyperphagia, a state of extreme increased eating, during which time they increase their body weight by up to 50 percent. The fat is mainly stored in the breast and flanks, and serves as energy over the long journey.
- Filming locations featured in WINGED MIGRATION include Iceland, Japan, Senegal, Kenya, Spain, Canada, Nepal, Argentina, India, Peru, Libya, Vietnam, as well as Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and New York in the U.S.
- The primary motivating factor behind migration is food, not weather. Many birds remain in cold locations, provided that there is an abundance of resources available. Birds choose to leave the tropics in the summer and travel north again to increase their breeding success. Northern climates offer an abundance of protein-rich food and greater areas over which the birds can spread.
- Habitat loss, caused by human development and agriculture, is the greatest threat to bird survival.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give others the chance to migrate with the birds.
2. **Learn** more about the threats facing migrating birds, and join the global celebration in place to protect birds. [World Migratory Bird Day](#) is an international event held once a year in cities around the globe.
3. **Eliminate** or reduce your use of herbicides and pesticides, which poison feeding birds, and provide birdseed and fresh water for the many migrating birds that make essential stopovers in our backyards and gardens.
4. **Get** involved with the [North American Breeding Bird Survey](#) - they can always use help in monitoring local bird populations.
5. **Drink** shade-grown, bird friendly coffee, which is grown in forested areas that allow bird life to thrive.

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Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.