

A Tall Tale But True

Written by Mary Michael Patterson

Strap line	Two birds, a long journey and a surprising ending that would make them famous
Category	Non-fiction children's ornithology age 3 years +
Format	Hardback, 1191 words
Topics	Climate change and its effect on bird migration. Protection of rare birds. Importance of wetlands for animals and birds. Observations by the general public that can be of importance. Wildlife reserves and how they provide safety for animals and birds. Our responsibility to take an active role in helping visitors who need our help.



Concept

Climate change and its effect on bird migration is the overall topic of this book. This remarkable and verifiable story is about a pair of black winged stilts who found themselves building a nest 2000 kilometres from where they should have been. The reader will follow these birds from when they built their nest until they departed south three months later.

The saying that “fact is more extraordinary than fiction” applies well to this book. This astonishing account has all the suspense, drama and happy ending of children’s fiction. No one knew how this tale would play out when it started. When the birds flew away at the end of the book it was obvious that their story needed to be told. This rare event presented a unique opportunity to convey concepts of nature, conservation, climate change and simple human decency via a “personal bird” story; introducing the young reader to the exciting world of ornithological events and how anyone can make a difference.

The nucleus of this story was in my daily photographic account of these curious visitors – from when they first made their nest until their eventual departure from our shores. Although the photo record did not capture the events prior to the birds’ arrival, the explanation as to where they came from and what route they took to fly to the UK was a likely scenario based on careful research.

Marketing

The striking appearance of these birds, with their extremely long, thin and pink legs will catch any child’s imagination. Today more than ever, parents are looking for fun, educational books for their children that can spark an interest and engagement in the natural world. The market for factual stories is growing. Chris Packham, wildlife expert, has partnered up with a well known London publisher for two non-fiction books. The childrens’ book market is starting to open up for more a more factual approach to storytelling. The beautiful illustrations in my book, aside from stimulating the imaginations of the readers, could additionally be used for merchandising notebooks, stationary and posters. Digital educational and interactive tools for visualising migration and climate change could be used to broaden the engagement of older children and adults. Newspaper articles of this event were in many of the major UK newspapers and these could be displayed online along with other visual aids to emphasise the uniqueness of this story

Series

I have written two other non-fiction children’s books in a similar manner to this one, all beginning as photographic studies on bird behaviour.

About the author

I am American born but have lived in Europe for 45 years. My home is in West Sussex where I am self employed. In my free time I photograph birds and other aspects of wildlife, having been engaged in some form of photography all my life. Last year I was short-listed in the British Wildlife Photography Awards. My family background has been in publishing where my grandfather started the first pictorial magazine in California; running from 1925-1970. My father was also a photographer who documented the Mountain Troops during WWII. My daughter is a school teacher and one of my sons is a deep-sea ecologist at Oxford University. With their expertise I was able to present a book that is educational, factual and fun to read.

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