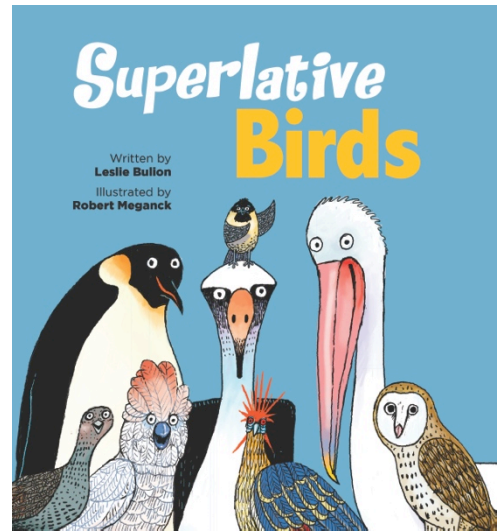


PEACHTREE
TEACHER'S GUIDE

Superlative Birds

Written by Leslie Bulion
Illustrated by Robert Meganck

HC: 978-1-56145-951-3
Ages 8–12 | Science, Poetry
Lexile • F&P • GRL U; Gr 5



ABOUT THE BOOK

Have fun as you explore the fascinating world of superlative birds—from the bee hummingbird, the tiniest bird in the world, to the peregrine falcon, the fastest creature on earth.

Ever wonder which bird has the loudest voice? Which one builds the biggest nest or has the most feathers? Come along and get to know all about the best and the brightest—and smelliest!—denizens of the bird world. You won't need your binoculars to observe the superlative characteristics of these avian wonders. Witty drawings by Robert Meganck add another layer of fun to this humorous and informative gallery of the world's most accomplished birds.

THEMES

Birds | Bird habitats | Animal world records
Science poetry

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Identifying Birds by Birdwatching

- Ask students to sketch a diagram or picture of a bird (they can refer to the chickadee's sketch on p. 9), and label the parts they recognize. They might include eyes, head, beak, wings, feathers, legs, and feet.

- As a group, ask students to name some local birds they know/recognize. Create a short, local species checklist.
- Ask students to describe characteristics of birds on their checklist. Many beginning birders might recall something like “The bird was red.” Color is one part of a bird's identity, and feather, beak, and even foot color can vary between males and females, between young birds and mature ones, and between breeding plumage (feather colors during mating and breeding season) and basic plumage (feather colors the rest of the year).
- As students read *Superlative Birds* have them find other clues in the illustrations that will help them recognize more about a bird's identity.
 - **Size:** Is a bird the size of a familiar bird, like a sparrow, a robin, a crow or a goose? (Check out the endpapers of *Superlative Birds* for size comparisons and read about the tiny hummingbird on p. 9).
 - **Shape:** Is the bird chunky or narrow-bodied, long-necked, short-tailed or long-tailed? How would you describe the shape of the woodcock on p. 29? The Arctic tern's shape on p. 21?
 - **Habitat:** Is the bird found in the woods? On the ground? Near a lake or the ocean? In an open field? (There are habitat clues on most pages of *Superlative Birds*.)

- **Size and Shape of Beak:** Is the bird's beak long and slender? Cone-shaped? Hooked? This is a clue to what the bird eats (See beaks on p. 18, 22, 25, 28, 35).
- **Legs and Feet:** Does the bird have long legs? Sharp talons? Webbed feet? (See p. 12, 14, 23, 41)
- **Behavior:** Perching? Flitting branch to branch? Hopping/scratching on the ground? Soaring, hardly flapping its wings? Swimming? Diving? Wading? (There are clues on many pages of *Superlative Birds*.)
- **Feathers/Color:** In some species of birds, males and females look the same. In other species their appearance is quite different.
 - The Central American three-wattled bellbird pictured (and singing!) on p. 38–39 is a male. Can you find pictures online or in a book of male and female three-wattled bellbirds? How are they the same? How are they different?
 - Now search for and compare pictures of male and female house finches from the U.S. and Mexico. (There's a male flying away from the northern shrike on p 24.) Students can check out the bird photo gallery on Leslie Bulion's website (www.lesliebulion.com/in-the-works) and see if they can recognize a *leucistic* male house finch. Leucistic birds have unexpected, white feathers that are missing the pigment melanin where darker feathers should be.
 - See if students can find photos of male and female black-capped chickadees. This is a trick question—why?
- Ask students to create an illustration of a bird created from their own imagined set of attributes using ideas from above. Does their bird have a *superlative* attribute?

Activity 2: Birdsong: Identifying Birds by Listening

- We can recognize birds by the music they make: calls and songs. Ask students: Why do birds make sounds? (See the science note for “Calling Contest,” p 31.)
- Use this link (<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/>) to the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology's “All About Birds” website and use the search box to find and play recordings of birdsongs students suggest, then

ask: What do you hear? Students may notice high or low volume, high or low pitch, repeated notes, many or relatively fewer notes in a song.

- Many bird songs and calls have mnemonics. See p. 42 for the black-capped chickadee example and descriptions of the notes as fast, slow, high-pitched, fluted, whistled, or harsh. Follow these links to hear common bird sounds:
 - **American goldfinch flight call**
www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Goldfinch/sounds (*po-ta-to chip, po-ta-to chip*)
 - **red-tailed hawk call**
www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-tailed_Hawk/sounds (a harsh-sounding *keeee-aaaaarr*)
 - **downy woodpecker**
www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Downy_Woodpecker/sounds (a sharp, high *pik, pik*, then repeated rapid *piks* in a descending pitch)
 - **white-throated sparrow**
www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/White-throated_Sparrow/sounds (a whistled *old Sam Peabody Peabody*)
 - **barred owl**
www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barred_Owl/sounds (choose the second recording to hear the characteristic hoot: *who cooks for you? who cooks for you-all?*)
- Ask students to compose a birdsong for the bird they created in Activity 1.

Activity 3: Write a *Superlative Birds* Poem!

- Use the QR code on p. 21 or click <http://peachtree-online.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Article-Terns-the-World-Round.m4a> to play the song poem Leslie Bulion wrote using the rhythm and rhyme pattern of an old sea chantey.
- Invite students to choose a simple song such as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” or “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” and follow its rhythm and rhyme pattern using their ideas from Activity 1 to write a song poem about their own newly-created *superlative* bird!

COMPANION READS

Check out these Peachtree books for more information about the wonderful world of birds!

- *About Birds* – by Cathryn Sill
- *About Hummingbirds* – by Cathryn Sill
- *About Parrots* – by Cathryn Sill
- *About Penguins* – by Cathryn Sill
- *About Raptors* – by Cathryn Sill

- *About Woodpeckers* – by Cathryn Sill
- *Agatha's Featherbed* – by Carmen Agra Deedy
- *Bird Count* – by Susan Edwards Richmond
- *Bring On the Birds* – by Susan Stockdale
- *Peep!* – by Kevin Luthardt
- *A Place for Birds* – by Melissa Stewart
- *Three Hens and a Peacock* – by Lester L. Laminack

REVIEWS

★ “Fascinating facts... Meganck’s illustrations are one-dimensional and friendly, placing the birds against uncluttered backgrounds while clearly emphasizing the characteristic being highlighted by each poem.”

—*Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

★ “With characteristic humor and carefully crafted language, poet Bulion offers readers amazing facts about birds of our world.... These engaging poems read aloud beautifully.... Meganck’s digital illustrations reflect the humorous tone.... Excellent resources for further bird study complete this delightful offering. Entertaining and educational, a superlative package.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, STARRED REVIEW

★ “Bulion is an accomplished wordsmith.... Illustration is engrossing, imaginative, instructive, and deftly calibrated to the tone of the text...there’s enough trivia here to stoke middle grade know-it-alls. Even readers who are merely on fact-finding missions, though, will be impressed by the breadth and engagement of Bulion’s chosen poetry forms.... In works such as *Superlative Birds*, the collaboration of poetry and science invites children of varying reading preferences, learning styles, and worldviews to enter nature study through their own chosen door.”

—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, STARRED REVIEW

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leslie Bulion has written poetry since fourth grade and has always been interested in science and nature. She earned graduate degrees in oceanography and social work and worked both as a medical and a school social worker. She is also the author of *Hey There, Stink Bug!*, *At the Sea Floor Café*, *Leaf Litter Critters*, and several novels for young readers. When Leslie is not on a research adventure or visiting schools, she enjoys birding closer to her home in Connecticut.

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Robert Meganck is a professor of illustration and graphic design at Virginia Commonwealth University. He has received over three hundred awards for his work. He lives in Virginia.

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