

A Peacock in Mid Flight

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2019-11-17

This morning, I saw a peacock in mid-flight. It was a wondrous and unforgettable sight, the more so because unexpected. I was walking as usual in the neighbourhood, which is known to be home to a large number of peacocks. As I turned to my right, I saw what I thought was an unusually long bird in flight. Only as it approached me did I realize that it was a peacock in mid-flight.

Its passage through the air was fluid and effortless: a picture of grace and elegance. It was like a silent airborne missile cruising at low altitude. It flapped its wings barely once or twice when it banked to turn right. And then it landed with aplomb. That was when I saw how long its tail really was. It appeared longer than the body and should certainly have contributed to the smoothest of landings of an airborne bird that I have ever seen.

Whether the tail contributes more to lift or drag, or whether it is simply a gorgeous rudder I cannot tell. But I marvelled at how Nature has patiently crafted the peacock—with its beautiful opalescent cyan neck and uniquely patterned feathers—over evolutionary time to complete the perfect marriage of form and function, of beauty and utility, of grace and majesty. Here was a bird that that flew like poetry in motion.

We human beings, when confronted by the magnificent feathers of a peacock, have have unfairly imposed our misshapen human values on them, and coined expressions like “proud as a peacock” and “strutting about like a peacock” even though we have no access to a peacock’s feelings.

From a biological point of view, colourful plumage in birds is designed to attract mates. Indeed, there are species who perform complicated courting rituals by using their feathers to best advantage. In the case of the peacock, it is the male that is spectacular; the female is more modestly beplumed.

I have always *heard* the neighbourhood peacocks more than *seen* them. And the call of the peacock does not not quite do justice to its looks. There is an old description of female pulchritude as embodying “the voice of a nightingale and the plumage of a peacock”. After hearing the peacocks, I have often chuckled to myself that if the two birds had been interchanged, the result would certainly be less than attractive.

If you had thought the peacock to be flightless, you would be excused. It is a rather large bird, like the swan. Seeing the peacock in flight, reminded me of the famed **Boeing 787 Dreamliner** aircraft now making its début worldwide, and being hailed for its efficiency and comfort. The peacock is proof that engineering and art can and do meet with superlative results.

The swan and the peacock are both large birds. Each has a peculiar beauty and grace. The swan serenely floating on water, and the peacock standing with its tail spread out, are epitomes of natural beauty. And when they fly, they both do so effortlessly and gracefully.

Interestingly, both birds feature in the mythology of Hinduism. Subrahmanya or Kārtikeya, the Divine General, rides a peacock. And Sarasvatī, the Goddess of Wisdom, is surrounded by both a peacock and a swan. The peacock's call is supposed to act as a tuning fork to help her tune her stringed instrument, the **vīṇā**, while the white swan represents divine discrimination.

I sorely wanted to capture the peacock in mid-flight, but it was too swift and sudden for me to photograph it. "Perhaps some other time," I consoled myself. I then realized the wonders of the Web and decided that there might sites with photographs of peacocks in flight. **The Smith's Bennie and Patsy blog entitled *Peacock In Flight*** has some magnificent shots. And there is another lovely image at **Peacock in Flight by Annu**.

For now, word pictures from me of the peacock in mid-flight must suffice. The peacock I saw was a dream gliding through air. It was effortless, efficient, smooth, graceful, unflustered, unflustered, powerful, silent, and exquisitely matched to the element. It was a superb blend of engineering and art, of power and poise, honed to perfection by millennia of evolution, a dream of heavenly beauty on earth.

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