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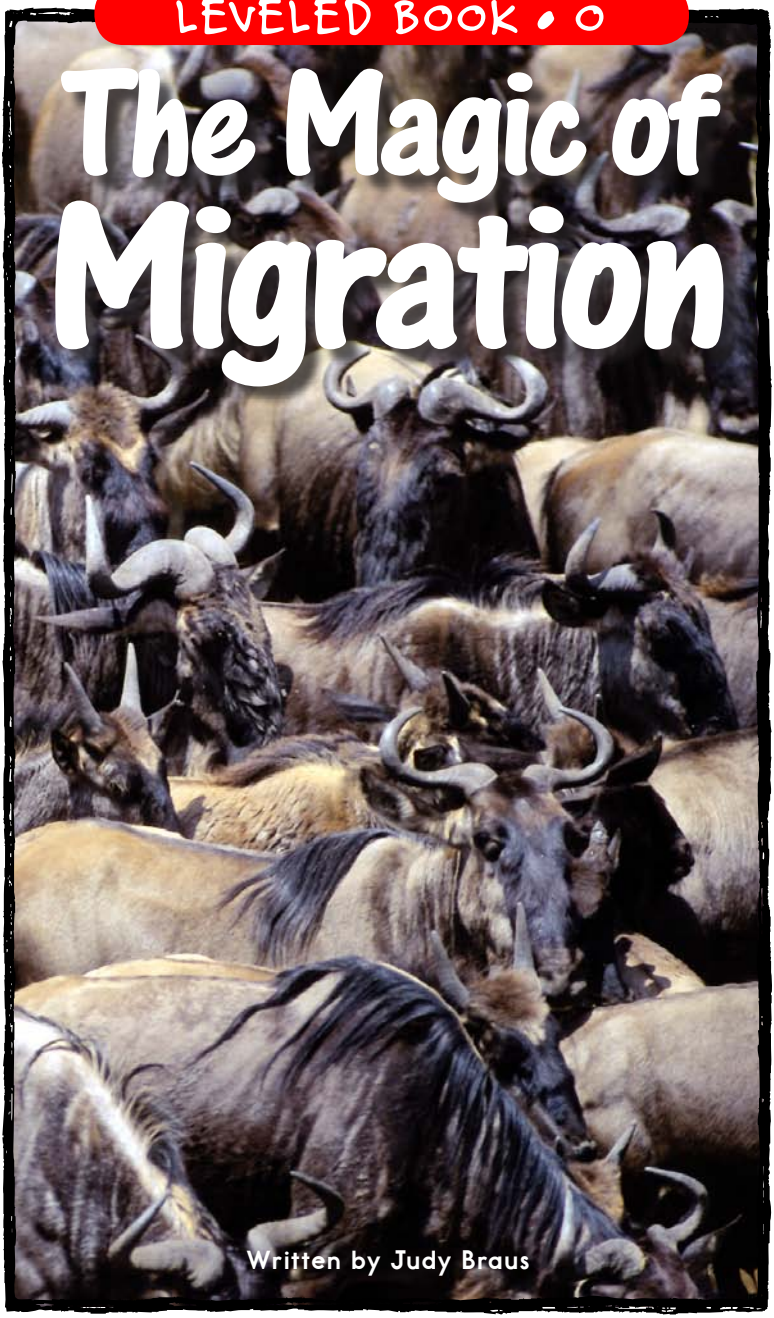
The Magic of Migration



Written by Judy Braus

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Geese head south for warmer climates in the fall.

Introduction

Some animals wing their way across the skies for hundreds or thousands of miles. Others thunder across great plains. And still others make their way through strong ocean currents. All are searching for food, water, warmer climates, or a place to raise their young. And all are taking part in the magic journey of **migration**.

What Is Migration?

Migration is the term scientists use to describe these animal journeys. And many different types of animals migrate. Birds, bats, whales, sea turtles, large grazers such as caribou and wildebeests, salmon, and even some kinds of insects move from one place to another to survive.

Pilot whales migrate.

Some animals migrate at the same time every year and follow the same path. Others follow more irregular patterns because their movement depends on local conditions, such as the weather. There are also some animals that only migrate one-way, such as masses of locusts that migrate when their numbers get so big that they need to find new sources of food. They stay in a new field until they need another source of food.

Locusts swarm a new feeding ground.

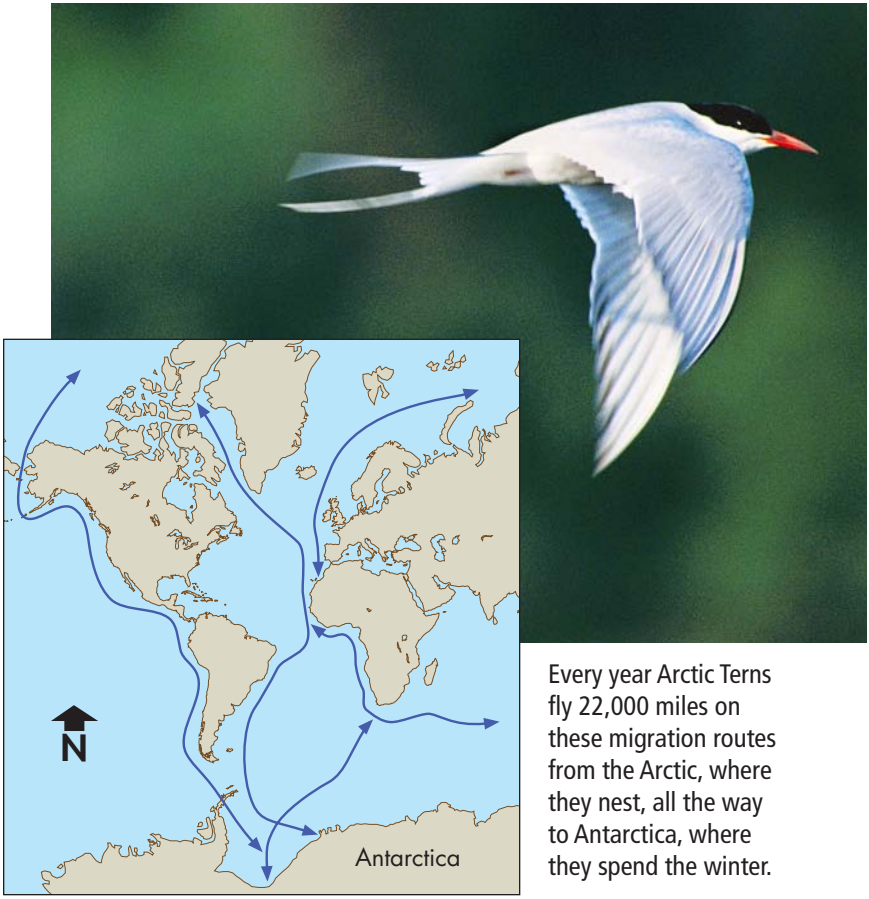
Hungry bears are a threat to migrating salmon.

Migration is one of the most dangerous journeys an animal can make. Migrating animals face many threats along the way, including hungry predators, strong winds, ocean currents, hunters, and fishermen. But migrating to find better living conditions is important for survival.

The Search for Food and Water

The most common reason why animals migrate is to find food and water. One of the most spectacular examples can be found in Africa. Every year more than a million **wildebeests**, which are large, grazing animals, migrate because of **drought**. When hot weather dries up grass and water supplies in one place, these fast-on-their-feet wildebeests travel in huge herds to find new sources of food and water. As these large mammals thunder across the great plains of eastern Africa, hundreds of thousands of zebras and gazelles join them on their journey.

Wildebeest

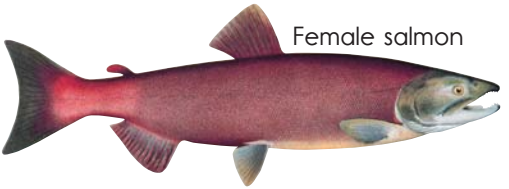


Every year Arctic Terns fly 22,000 miles on these migration routes from the Arctic, where they nest, all the way to Antarctica, where they spend the winter.

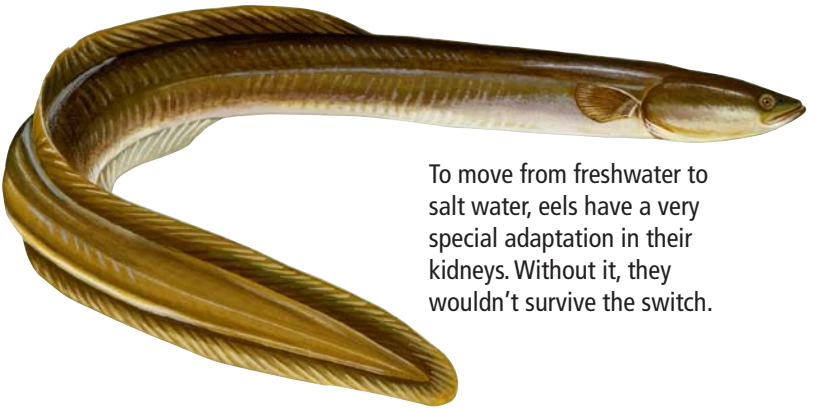
Many birds also make spectacular journeys to find the food they need. Warblers, flycatchers, storks, pelicans, terns, and all kinds of other birds migrate every year to find food.

Finding a Place to Nest

Another reason animals migrate is to find a place to lay their eggs or to raise their young. Many fish, such as salmon and trout, migrate to **spawn**, or lay their eggs, in freshwater streams. And some, such as freshwater eels, do the opposite, leaving their freshwater homes and migrating to the open sea to spawn.



Female salmon



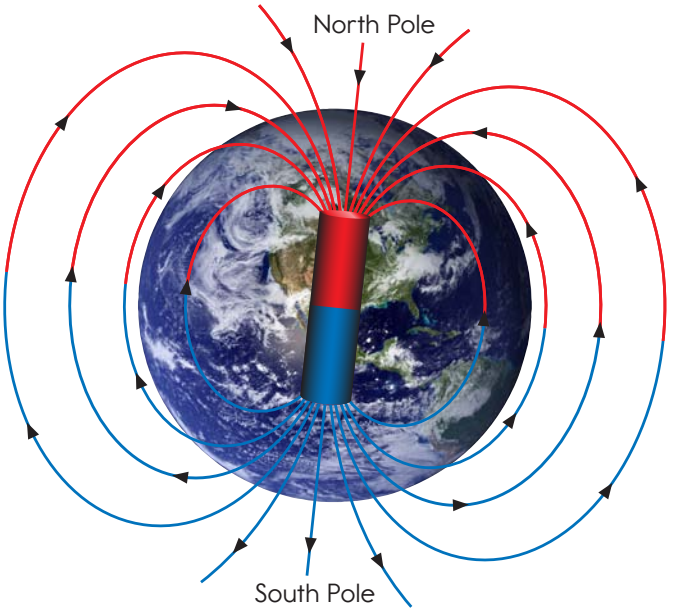
To move from freshwater to salt water, eels have a very special adaptation in their kidneys. Without it, they wouldn't survive the switch.

How Do They Do It?

Indigo Bunting

How do animals find their way when they migrate? Although scientists don't have all the answers yet, they are learning more every year about the mysteries of migration. Some animals, such as salmon, use their sense of smell to find the stream where they were first born. Others, such as indigo buntings and other night-flying birds, use the stars to guide their way. Day-flying birds use the sun and also watch for special landmarks, such as coastlines and mountains, to stay on course.

Scientists are still exploring other ways that animals **navigate**. They believe some animals are able to sense Earth's magnetic pull to guide them.



Earth's magnetic field acts like a giant magnet inside the Earth.

Magnetic Brains

Think of Earth as a giant magnet. Scientists think that many species of birds navigate by sensing Earth's magnetic north and south poles. They have found tiny particles of a magnetic substance, magnetite, in some birds' brains. They think these tiny particles are pulled by Earth's poles, helping guide birds as they migrate.

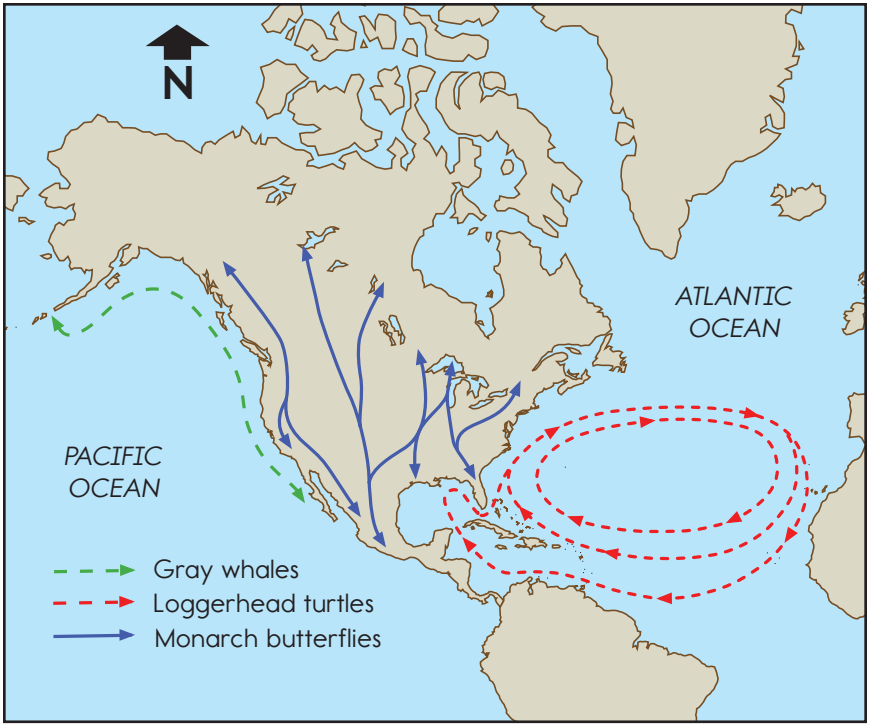
Insects, Whales, and Turtles

One of the most interesting yearly migrations is that of monarch butterflies. These bright orange and black butterflies travel from the northern and eastern parts of North America to Mexico and southern parts of the United States. They spend winter on specific trees in the mountains. In the spring, the adults return north, breeding along the way. The adults die after the females lay eggs. The eggs develop into young butterflies that complete the journey back home.

Monarch butterflies

Many marine creatures also migrate—from huge humpback whales to lobsters, sharks, sea turtles, and tuna. Some, such as many of the sea turtles, follow ocean currents to get from one part of the vast ocean to another. But scientists still don't know how these creatures find exactly the right beach to lay their eggs—the same one they hatched on years before.

Main: Baby loggerhead turtles head out to sea after hatching on the same beach where their parents were born. Inset: Adult loggerhead



Migration paths

Every year, millions of animals move from one place to another to find food, water, better weather, or a place to nest or raise their young. Some travel alone, but others travel in huge flocks or herds. But no matter how they travel, they all take the magical journey of migration.

Glossary

drought a long period with little or no rainfall (p. 8)

migration the periodic movement of animals from one place to another (p. 4)

navigate to fing one's way over a long distance (p. 12)

spawn to lay eggs (p. 10)

wildebeests large, ox-like African antelopes with a long, tufted tail (p. 8)

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