

Skills Worksheet

Critical Thinking

Masters of Navigation

For many people, the most intriguing aspects of bird biology and behavior are associated with homing and migration. Several years ago, for example, a friend and I were nest-trapping Blue-winged Teal in Iowa. We captured a female that had been banded the previous year at a nest only thirty-five feet from the present one. I remember stroking her plumage and wondering if she spent the winter in Louisiana, Texas, or Mexico. It didn't make any difference as she certainly hit the bulls-eye on her return. While I found the accuracy of this hen teal to be remarkable, it is not extraordinary by avian standards...

A very dramatic migration is seen in the New Zealand Bronzed Cuckoo. These birds are parasitic, laying eggs in the nests of host species that hatch and rear the young cuckoos. In the fall, about a month after the parents migrate, the young cuckoos get together and begin migrating to their wintering ground. The birds fly almost 1,200 miles west to Australia and then nearly 1,000 miles north to the Solomon and Bismark Islands where they join their parents.

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USEFUL TERMS

intriguing exciting interest or curiosity

homing finding the way home

nest-trapping trapping birds in their nests for observation

plumage feathers

avian of or having to do with birds

parasitic describes an organism that is dependent upon a host organism for survival, usually without killing its host

OBSERVING FOR DETAIL

1. Do you think the migration of the Blue-winged Teal is more likely innate behavior or learned behavior? Explain.

Critical Thinking *continued*

2. Do you think the migration of the New Zealand Bronzed Cuckoo is more likely innate behavior or learned behavior? Explain.

DEMONSTRATING REASONED JUDGMENT

3. In order to navigate, birds often use a combination of visual clues, their sense of smell, the Earth's magnetic field, and the sun. Which of these would be most useful in an unfamiliar area? Explain your answer.

MAKING COMPARISONS

4. How is the navigation of migratory birds similar to the navigation of an airplane pilot?

5. How is the navigation of migratory birds different from the navigation of an airplane pilot?

MAKING INFERENCES

6. Migration patterns vary among different species of birds. List three factors that might cause migration patterns to vary.
