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Before Reading

1 Bird quiz

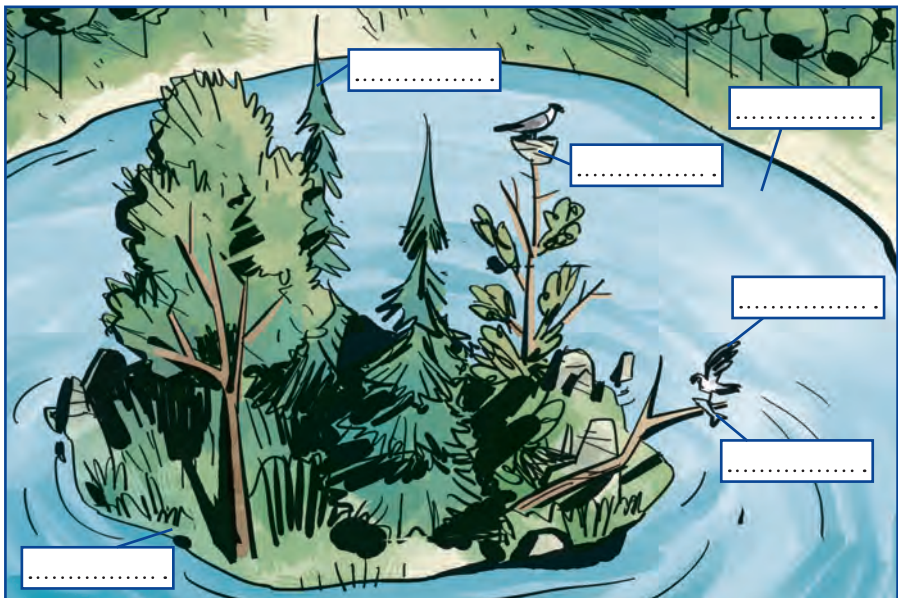
Think about the birds you know which live in your country. How many different ones can you name? See if you can write down the names of twelve birds. Do you know any of their names in English?

- | | | |
|---------|---------|----------|
| 1 | 5 | 9 |
| 2 | 6 | 10 |
| 3 | 7 | 11 |
| 4 | 8 | 12 |

2 Look and complete

Look at the picture and write the words in the box in the correct places.

- | | | |
|--------|-----------|------|
| osprey | fish | nest |
| island | pine tree | lake |



3 Who is who in the story?

Match the descriptions to the pictures.



- | | |
|----|--|
| a) | Hello, I'm Don's dad. Don's really into birdwatching and I love looking at the pictures he takes. |
| b) | Hello, I'm Don Ball. I'm 15 and I love birdwatching. Oh, and I've got a quick temper, too. |
| c) | Hello there. I'm Sergeant Keddle. I'm the policeman in Saltley. It's usually quiet here, but then Mike and Don discovered something interesting. |
| d) | Hi, I'm Mike Peters, I'm 15 and I'm Don's best friend. I've got blond hair and my most prized possession is my binoculars. |

4 Think and discuss

The osprey is an endangered species. What other endangered species do you know in the world? Why do animals, plants and birds become endangered? What happens when an animal, plant or bird becomes extinct? Do you know the names of any extinct wildlife? What can people do to prevent endangered species becoming extinct?

5 What do you think?

The title of this book is *Operation Osprey*. What do you think the story is going to be about?



A text invitation

2 I was coming home from school on the bus on Tuesday, when I got a text message from Mike. It was very short: Mkt X 7. UGNT. I knew that this meant he wanted to meet me at the Market Cross at seven o'clock that evening and that it was something urgent. It was also a bit unusual. We'd arranged to meet after school on Friday to plan our weekend's birdwatching as usual, so this must be something special. I felt excited!

Let me give you some background. My name's Don Ball. I'm fifteen and I go to Blueway Comprehensive School. Mike (or Mike Peters, to give him his full name) is the same age and goes to the local grammar school, but we've been friends since junior school. We both live in the village of Saltley, which is in the Midlands. We've been birdwatching together since we were 11. I suppose we're quite good at it now, because we do it regularly, read about it, use the Net to find out about birds, and we're members of a club for birdwatchers, too.

THINK

What do you think Mike is going to tell Don when they meet?

Glossary

- **arranged:** planned
- **background:** extra details about the characters and story
- **Comprehensive School:** secondary school for boys and girls of all abilities
- **suppose:** think

When I got home, I got some biscuits and orange juice and went up to my room to get on with • my homework so that I could go out and meet Mike later. It took me longer than usual to do it because my mind kept wandering •, thinking of what Mike wanted to tell me. He must have seen an unusual bird. (Of course, I thought his text message must be because of a bird!!)

It was early April and birds which had gone south to warmer countries for the winter were coming back to Britain for the summer now. We were looking forward to ‘meeting old friends’ ... but there was always the chance of something rare and unusual arriving, too.



Hearing the news

③ At 6.45 I left the house and walked down the road to the centre of the village. Saltley is a small place. There’s an old church, two pubs, a post office, a grocer’s and a couple of other general shops.

It’s home to about 1000 people — half of them work on the nearby farms and the other half commute • to the nearest big city to work. And right in the middle of the small square in the centre of Saltley stands the Market Cross, which is a well-known meeting-place for everyone from the area.

I said hello to several people I knew as I walked over to sit on the steps at the base of the stone cross.

Soon I heard Mike’s familiar lapwing • whistle •, and saw him standing on the other side of the road. I walked over.

“Hi, Mike. What’s this about?” I asked at once.

Glossary

- **commute:** travel to work every day
- **get on with:** (here) do immediately
- **lapwing:** type of bird
- **wandering:** thinking of one thing then another
- **whistle:** high sound made by blowing between your lips

“Just wait a moment until we’re away from the crowd and I’ll tell you,” he answered mysteriously.

We walked over to the church yard and sat on one of the benches.

“So?” I asked again.

“Oooh you’re so impatient!” he joked, but I could tell that he was excited, too.

I waited. He began.

“I took the day off school today,” he said. “After this week of good weather followed by last night’s storm, I thought there might be some good birds about.”

“And were there?” I asked.

“Well, there are some nice new arrivals – a few swallows, a chiffchaff calling,” he answered. “But then I went to RP.”

RP was the name we gave to a set of three small lakes surrounded by woods. They were labelled Redman’s Pools on large-scale maps, but lots of people didn’t know they were there because they were hidden by trees.




- **day off:** one day’s holiday
- **chiffchaff:** type of a bird
- **large-scale maps:** maps that show things in detail

I waited again. A smile played over Mike's face.

"Osprey," he said very quietly.

"What!?" I shouted.

 "Osprey," he said again, simply. I sat staring at him with my mouth open.

I should explain. An osprey is a big hunting bird, which catches fish. It's really spectacular when it dives into the water feet first and catches a big fish and flies off with it. There weren't any in Britain because they'd been hunted too much, but then in 1954 a pair nested in Loch Garten in Scotland. They were protected by the RSPB, because lots of people wanted the eggs for their collections. But now they've spread to nest at lots of lakes around Scotland. People hope that they will soon start nesting all over England, too.

We'd never seen an osprey at RP before, and I'd never seen one at all. Mike had seen one when he'd been on a birdwatching trip to Scotland last summer. I was jealous.

"I watched it for more than an hour. It flew in from the trees on Castle Hill. I knew something was coming because all the ducks flew away," he said. "And then it circled over Big Pool twice, and sat in the pine trees on the island in the middle. It flew away to the west."

We were silent – he was thinking about what he'd seen and I was thinking what I had missed while I'd been sitting in my maths class that afternoon.

Glossary

- **dives:** jumps into water
- **nested:** made a nest in order to have babies
- **RSPB:** Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- **spread:** moved to different places

After a time, Mike said: “So, shall we go to RP tomorrow morning?”

“But I’ve got school”, I said.

“So have I,” he said. “Just like today.”

“But do you think it’ll be there?” I asked.

“Birdwatcher!” he said. By which he meant that if I was a birdwatcher, I should know that nobody could say what a bird would or wouldn’t do at a particular time, especially when they were migrating.

“So, are you coming?”

“Oh...oh...alright,” I said, knowing my parents would be very angry if they found out. They already thought I spent too much time birdwatching and not enough time studying.

