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BIRD TALK #1

Bird's eye view

March 16, 2023, 7pm @hinterland

English Summary of Bird Talk #1

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On March 16, 2023, the first “bird talk” was held, featuring ornithologist and behaviorist Dr. Virginie Canoine, University of Vienna, as the guest speaker. The talk was led by cultural and project manager Ulrike Fallmann, and visitors gathered to better understand the behavior of birds.

The topic of this first “bird talk” was inspired by the epic book "Conference of the Birds" by Farid Ud Din Attar, in which birds play a symbolic role. The conversation first approached the story from a scientific perspective, which, as it turns out, establishes closer points of reference to us humans than one might initially think. Gudrun Wallenböck, founder and artistic director of *hinterland*, asked how the story's content could be translated into something that is universally applicable.

The dialogue focused on bird behavior, particularly migratory behavior, which is central to the survival of many bird species. The conversation raised several important questions, such as what happens on a migratory journey and why birds undertake such journeys.

Dr. Canoine shared insights into various bird species, including those featured in Attar's story. She discussed how the hoopoe, a self-appointed leader in the story and a symbol of resistance, is a migratory bird with a strong presence in Austria. She also talked about the nightingale, a symbol of love, and the peacock, which is not a migratory bird but migrates from its habitat in search of food. The session also addressed the parrots and their preoccupation with speech and imitation, the monogamous behavior of ducks and parrots, and the hunting skills of falcons and owls.

An amusing video of the courtship behavior of birds made the "humanity" of birds visible in an interesting way. Birds are basically ideal study creatures in relation to humans and are good bioindicators. They are subject to a variety of mating systems and courtship behaviors. The physiological behavior accommodates a perfect species due to the seasonality and endogenous rhythms of birds. Dr. Canoine also elaborated on the relationship between birds and humans, highlighting how humans have long admired the colorfulness and beauty of birds, as well as their freedom to fly. However, insults related to birds are also common in human speech.

The conversation included a reflection of how birds are used as bioindicators of the seasons and the different bird species that are considered symbol birds in various countries. The talk also touched on the subject of bird migration, which is featured prominently in Attar's story. In the story, the birds set out in search of Simorgh, a supposed savior, and traverse through seven valleys.

Why do birds actually migrate? Because of the Ice Age and the severe cold in Europe, birds had to migrate. Spring brings ideal breeding conditions, winter, in turn, is not ideal to hibernate to survive, so it takes the birds through the sea, over the Sahara, driven by the strong conviction to arrive somewhere where they can survive.

It used to be thought that birds were just very quiet in the winter, retreating high into the trees. It was not obvious that birds migrate. It wasn't until the discovery of the *Rostock Arrow Stork* from the 13th and 14th centuries that bird migration became clear. Birds are characterized by endogenous rhythms and alternate

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changes of day and night activity. Light pollution caused by humans is dangerous for birds in this sense: strongly lit skyscrapers, for example, interfere with birds' natural orientation.

The question arose to what extent humans imitate birds, for example in flamenco dancing. Dr. Canoine explained how migration is essential for bird survival, as it allows them to find suitable breeding and hibernation conditions.

Overall, the talk was engaging and enlightening, offering visitors a deeper understanding of the behavior and significance of different bird species and how they could be manifested in culture and literature. Dr. Canoine's expertise and passion for birds shone through, making for a fascinating and memorable experience for attendees.