

How did the birds heal me?

Kirsty Venters Marks

A Phoenix Flock

1

Cuckoo

When this spring lays eggs
Any nest is home; hatching
Is the longed for joy

2

Blackbird

And speed is the song
Of the blackbird darting through
This dark green morning

3

Rook

The plague doctor nods
A silver mask; the story
Often croaked before

4

Kingfisher

Turquoise over the
River, like a dragonfly
In a blur of wings

5

Antipodean Albatross

Lost white hang-glider
Drifting over an open
Sea; distant and free

6

Kestrel

Arc-ed, half a halo
Golden wings float above the
Unburned moor, waiting

7

Raven

Skye blue, raven heart
Blaven clouds, speckled with black
This corvid weather

8

Blue tit

Where gravity is
Found, the tiny acrobat
Defies its angles

9

Kookaburra

Laughing at their own
Jokes, the kookaburra perch
In steep Sydney streets

10

Green woodpecker

Down from the cherry
Tree, green and red on the lawn
We lock silent eyes

11

Chaffinch

Between moss and moor
Ghost birch gather, in ashes
A chaffinch sings life

12

Goldcrest

Tiny as the dream
Morning stole away, of those
Golden wings we lost

13

House sparrow

The childhood garden
And yesterday's visitors
To a house long left

14

Swallow

Come swooping on drifts
Of summer fire, squealing through
Alleyways of sky

15

Robin

The message is clear:
This patch is not mine; I am
Only visiting

17

Eurasian magpie

After the counting
Ended, there was one magpie
Left, its secret told

19

White stork

Deliberate steps
The stork's tai chi patterns drawn
Across this flat land

21

Golden eagle

Big enough, that sky
To hold those angel wings, the
Ones Roberto found

23

Meadow pipit

We start our walk as
The moor rises in wings and
Meadow pipit song

25

Bald eagle

The orca boat sailed
Bounced waves from shores where only
Sentinels remained

27

Dunnock

Hopping by the hedge
From one to the next of her
Grey-brown paramours

29

Carrion crow

Left, after the pyre
Radiant black and calling
A prayer for hope

16

Red grouse

The heather burns in
Purple flames and the cackle
Rises up like smoke

18

Grey heron

Above and below
So the heron stands, in both
Reflection and flesh

20

Nuthatch

The nuthatch tale is
Told backwards, headfirst down the
Tree-trunk, end to start

22

Barn owl

The silence, its flight
Its rotating face, the moon
Still glowing at dawn

24

Greenfinch

In the hedge something
Moves; leaves and feathers and breeze-
Blown wishes unfurl

26

Rainbow lorikeet

Curtains open on
Bright branches, a memory
Undestroyed by time

28

Mute swan

Cut the thick silence
Those unmuted wings, low and
Wide, sharp as sunrise

30

Crested tit

The shadows form a
Path through mountain branches, where
We meet, in surprise

31

Curlew

And the call dissolved
In moorland rain, swept outwards
To the sea, beyond

32

Yellowhammer

Prospectors for gold
Find their treasure in the hedge:
No pickaxe required

33

Jay

The jay and I met
In the London furnace, both
Of us burning free

34

Oyster catcher

Attention shifting
From desks to windows: beach birds,
A contrail of sea

35

Wedge-tailed eagle

Above dry rivers
Circling the red heart rising
The shape of dreaming

36

Eiderduck

Moving with the tide
Melting with the sky into
Water with the waves

37

Mistle thrush

From the juniper
Through the thin shadow of death
Flies the kirkyard thrush

38

Goosander

The Water of Leith
Swims past, goosander green and
Clear of lost feathers

39

Pink-footed goose

Arrows fly above
Pointing north, where summer melts
Into loud winter

40

Buzzard

Circles and high calls
Through an emptying sky, the
Nothingness expands

41

Alpine chough

This thin air clears now
We share a mountain view and
Believe ourselves birds

42

Hooded crow

The Elgol road winds;
That shimmering marshland fills
With half-shadow birds

43

Great crested grebe

This water holds us
I swim through the distance and
Watch the quiet grebe

44

Starling

The murmurs of the
Heart flock, pulsing, as evening
Falls in miracles

45

Black woodpecker

How it stills our words
The deep echo drills through
The mountain forest

46

Red kite

I had not known how
Big this freedom would be, how
No string could tie it

47

Redshank

At the green shore, I
Wondered if the red-leg bird
Longed, too, for home

48

Redwing

A day I'd thought lost
Was returned to me, flown back
From Iceland, red-winged

49

Cormorant

The dinosaur dries
In crucifixion pose, the
Escape from drowning

50

Sparrowhawk

Red in tooth and claw
Shed feathers to the wind like
Bleeding autumn leaves

51

Sulphur-crested cockatoo

The question mark crest
Raised in curious yellow
Wonders what we mean

52

Black-headed gull

The old colour fades
Summer-bleached, shrunken, a last
Dot of memory

53

Jackdaw

The evening draws lines
Dark chains flocking home to roost
Closing ice blue eyes

54

Wren

Size does not always
Equate to volume; stand back!
Let the wren unleash

55

Gannet

Cliffs firing arrows
Daggering down and soaring
Again: freedom's flight

56

Little owl

Time is lost to us
Day could just as well be night
Watched by hidden eyes

57

Pied wagtail

My silent words you
Heard, a vow witnessed, flicking
Your tail to agree

58

Eurasian crane

These fields grow long legs
Rising into the wide, flat
Distance; winter's end

59

Wood pigeon

Five note lullaby
Sung to the hatchling almost
Too big for its nest

60

Coal tit

Morning mist rising
The smoke of dawn through Scots pine
Pierced by tiny wings

61

Sea eagle

A salt sky above
I swim through its reflection
To break eagle waves

62

Partridge

Winter solstice path
I walked through the Poet's Glen
As dusk met us both

63

Siskin

Yellow, flown fresh from
Forests where squirrels drop red
Cinders from the trees

64

Blackcap

Spring awoken with
Clattering blackcap voices:
Let the winter snore

65

Galah

Feeling for morning
Pink sky blanketed with wings
Covering day's end

66

Rainbow bee-eater

How angels view the
Forest, raining colour for
These miracle wings

67

Goldfinch

"Herr Marks, this bird is
Injured!" The children know he'll
Bring it back to life

68

Osprey

Wide-winged traveller
Come dancing over water
And rise, talons full

69

Rock pigeon

I cross Trafalgar
Square in flying dreams, then wake
To pigeon song here

70

Treecreeper

My steps stumbled in
The broken silence, where bark
Flakes fell at my feet

71

Sand martin

The banks are pock-marked
With nests; water breaks diamonds
And summer swoops gold

72

Mallard

Wee fingers scabbled
For stale bread; memory crumbs
Fell to the old pond

73

Archaeopteryx

Fossil songs are heard
Bursting out from cracking stones
The first dawn chorus

74

Long-eared owl

On a fence post sits
The watcher, caught bright in day
Listening with eyes

75

Long-tailed tit

Scattering through these
Sharp birch branches, in loud joy;
Feathered dragonflies

76

Peacock

In the remains of
Knossos, a defiant crack
Of blue calls, "Life!"

77

Dipper

Fly through water, eyes
Open and rise again to
Dance, on rocks, in air

78

Redstart

With a thought to fly,
We settled on climbing, watched
By curious eyes

79

Greater spotted woodpecker

When I saw the flash
Between lockdown trees, I could
Fly myself away

81

Emu

Dry horizons filled
With long necks tilting questions
And soft, flightless wings

83

Moorhen

We walk the edges
Of the new day's waters; you
Glow; I watch the birds

85

Greylag goose

All the geese will leave
And fly to bright summer, but
Not all will arrive

87

Herring gull

The shadows bring their
Boats to Newhaven harbour
Circled by ghost gulls

89

Whooper swan

When I confused the
Silence with the sound, yellow
Beaks opened, un-mute

91

Coot

The slow afternoon
River is carved in tonsured
Traversing: coot trails

93

Puffin

Breathless whirr of wings
Flight, in colourful pieces
Land and sea and air

80

Swift

The sky is not thin
The cloud can be broken, strafed
By wing-sleeping swifts

82

Collared dove

A broken branch holds
Them both, huddled and cooing
In what we call love

84

Great tit

The thin stem buckled
The flowerhead was bouncing
Feed from gripping toes

86

Pheasant

This dinosaur walks
Draped in thick bronze, only time's
Window between us

88

Black stork

From secrets and dark
Branches, the stork hatches and
Lost shell fragments fall

90

White-throated kingfisher

The island flickers
With feathers, where Minoan
Sailors once landed

92

Songthrush

Sunset burns orange
With a soundtrack of thrush song
Cinders of music

94

Pelican

Night reflects distance
Pelican constellations
Hemispheres apart

95

Tawny owl

The night is not quite
Over, **but** the changing of
Shifts is almost due

96

Yellow wagtail

River stones balance
Tails **beating** their own rhythm
The water flows on

97

Splendid fairy wren

Where blue is more than
Sky, fairies summon splendour:
It lives **within** us

98

Bullfinch

The birds speak to **me**:
If I really listen, the
Bullfinch knows my name

99

Three-toed woodpecker

Perhaps it only
Appears when we leave **an** old
Path and make new trails

100

Phoenix

All that disappeared
Was meant to fade. The phoenix
Is an **unburned heart**

A Phoenix Flock

This is the story of an unburned heart
Found in the ashes of yesterday's fire
The flames ended, so the tale found its start
Something remained, undestroyed by the pyre

Form dissolved in the furnace, shifting shape
Melting the past into nothingness now
That quiet heart, it had longed to escape
Shed the old chains, unleash freedom's lost vow

Into the smoke I walked, fresh awoken
Feeling for life, and I stumbled and fell:
Heard a sharp crack and thought myself broken
And broken I was, but only the shell

I landed, in cinders, pieces apart
But beating within me, an unburned heart