

Valentine's Day: A Holiday for the Birds

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Valentine from 1940
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

From lovebirds to doves, our feathered friends are everywhere on Valentine's Day. But associating birds with this romantic tradition began long before Hallmark: A few scholars suggest that its February date is associated with birds' mating seasons and some cultures even used birds to predict their marital future. In this vein, *Audubon* explores the origins of birds and Valentine's Day, offering our own bird-inspired love predictions as well.

The history of St. Valentine's Day ^[1] is elusive at best—some believe the holiday honors Valentinus, an early Christian martyr, while others claim it dates back to Lupercalia, an ancient pastoral holiday observed from February 13-14 in which cities were purified of evil spirits. Still others ^[2] say the day originated from the assumption that halfway through the second month of the year, birds would begin to choose their mates.

This belief—commonly accepted in England and France during the Middle Ages—is demonstrated in Geoffrey Chaucer's "Parlement of Foules," ^[3] written about the marriage of King Richard II of England to Anne of Bohemia in 1382:

*For this was on seynt Volantynys day
Whan euery bryd comyth there to chese his make.*

[Roughly translated to: "For this was Saint Valentine's Day,

when every bird cometh there to choose his mate."]

In one tradition, birds are even more important: It was believed [4] that a girl's first bird sighting on Valentine's Day predicted her future husband.

Some traditional bird predictions:

- Sparrow: a poor man or a farmer
- Owl: remain spinster
- Bluebird: a happy man or a happy but poor man
- Blackbird: a priest or clergyman
- Crossbill: an argumentative man or an angry man
- Yellowbird: a well-off man
- Goldfinch: an extremely wealthy man
- Robin: a crime fighter or a sailor
- Dove: a kind and good man
- Flock of doves: you will have a happy marriage

[But, if you see a woodpecker, you will never marry.]



Valentine from 1862 (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Because the above list is somewhat limited, we can't help but make our own predictions from other bird sightings (be sure to add your own in the comments section!).

Audubon's bird predictions:

- Bald eagle: a government official
- Peacock: a vain man
- Great egret: a tall man
- Penguin: a well-dressed man
- Pigeon: a city-dweller

Let us know what your bird sighting today predicts and have a Happy Valentine's Day!

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- [2] <http://www.novareinna.com/festive/valrites.html>
- [3] <http://omacl.org/Parliament/>
- [4] <http://www.stvalentinesday.org/valentines-day-fun-fact.html>