

THE DUCK MIGRATION BRIGADE

水鴨南渡大隊

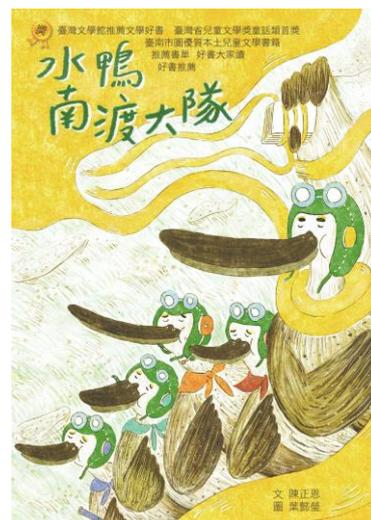
Each year, the northern-born water ducks make a long, arduous journey to the warm shores of Taiwan for the winter, but it's a perilous trip where they must do everything in their power to survive natural disasters and evade the threat of humans.

For the water ducks born in the north, they must escape the harsh winter by migrating to the warm southern country of Taiwan even though it requires them to fly for several months each year. Just as a large flock is setting out, they unexpectedly run into a storm and many of their group are sacrificed in the process. After resting and recuperating, they set out again but this time they hear a young girl on the sea crying for help. This suddenly puts them in a dilemma: they are afraid of humans but at the same time they can't bear to leave her. What should they do? Will they set aside their fear of humans and help the young girl?

The book presents the process of the ducks' voyage south in an anthropomorphic way, profoundly portraying the reluctant farewells between the ducks and their family members, as well as the heroic sacrifices they make on their arduous journey, and the friendship that blossoms between the animals and the humans. The author's powerful, emotionally charged writing reflects his deep compassion for nature and his hope that young readers will treat animals and the environment with more empathy after finishing this book.

Text by Chen Cheng-En 陳正恩

Originally from Pingtung but now living in Tainan, Chen Cheng-En is a retired elementary school principal. He enjoys creating stories that children can read and listen to, and he is also deeply passionate about nature and protecting the environment.



Category: Chapter Book

Publisher: Little Soldier

Date: 11/2022

Rights contact:

booksfromtaiwan@taicca.tw

Pages: 96

Length: 5,293 characters
(approx. 3,400 words in English)

Age: 9+

Material: English sample

Illustrated by Yeh I-Ying 葉懿瑩

Yeh I-Ying is an illustrator from Taiwan. She graduated from Camberwell College of Arts (London) with an MA in Visual Arts. Her illustrations have been featured in newspapers, magazines, and book covers since 2010, and *I Feel Therefore I Am* was featured in *American Illustration* 30 in 2011.

THE DUCK MIGRATION BRIGADE

By Chen Cheng-En

Translated by Helen Wang

Chapter 1: Tearful Instructions

The bone-chilling north wind blew across the land. Dry leaves heavy with cold dew streamed like tears to the ground.

The ducks were busy by the side of the lake, preening their wings, or still looking for food in the cold marsh, hoping to fill their bellies before the annual migration to the south.

This year's flight leader was Flying Southward Hsiang. After careful consideration, he had finalized the name-lists for the Vanguard Early Warning Team. In order to protect everyone else, these outstanding young team members would have to put themselves in unpredictable danger, fly at the front of the team, look out for all kinds of unexpected situations, and alert everyone else at any time. Just thinking about it made Flying Southward Hsiang felt tense.

As he looked at the thick flight log with the yellow threads tied around it, Flying Southward Hsiang could hear his father's instructions as he handed the log book to him:

"... at least 30 out of each 100-strong Vanguard Early Warning Team must return to the south safely, or else... you must also tie a yellow thread around the log book." Flying Southward Hsiang could almost see his father's deep moist eyes and his trembling body.

"Each yellow thread represents 70 young lives, and these overlapping ones, alas..." Flying Southward Hsiang couldn't bear to go on.

For Flying Southward Hsiang, these yellow threads were not only markers of grief, but they were also a deep reminder that he could never forget.

The ducks lined up by the lake and waited for the Vanguard Early Warning Team name list to be called out. It was so quiet you could have heard a pine-needle drop.

"Clear Vision Chao." At last, Flying Southward Hsiang read out the first name.

"Aagh!" Chao's mother gasped, tears welling in her eyes.

Chao's father spread his wing around his son and said hoarsely, "Keep your eyes open, son! And don't fly into a bird net, they're fatal."

"Ears Alert Chien." Flying Southward Hsiang didn't dare look at the Chien family for fear the final parting would leave him unable to continue reading, but he could still hear the wavering voice of Chien's elderly father, "Son, I am proud of you. You must always listen carefully, and if you hear a human voice, don't go anywhere near it."

"Smart Mouth Sun."

"Don't eat anything without checking it carefully. Humans put poison everywhere!"

"Quick Mover Li."

“Watch out for bird-traps, grandson! Don’t be like your uncle, I can still remember the look of despair in his eyes when he was hanging upside down in the trap.”

“Beat the Wind Chen.”

“...”

“Face the Rain Lin.”

“...”

Each name he read out was like a hard rock in his heart. He could almost feel the mood of his ancestors as they tied a yellow thread around the flight log book. All because of humans.

Every duck has a line of yellow feathers above its eyes. It’s a symbol found on all the duck family, a declaration of unity in life and death.

Flying Southward Hsiang used his foot to smooth the yellow feathers above his eye. When they came back from migration last year, all the surviving ducks had plucked a few yellow feathers from each other to make a yellow thread, and that scene came to mind again very clearly. Yellow feathers can grow back, but sad memories never disappear.

Flying Southward Hsiang prayed with all his heart: Please let us not need a yellow thread this year!

Flying Southward Hsiang spread his wings, checked which way the wind was blowing, and decided that they would set off the next day. He looked at the flight log book, then casually opened it to the first page, which had yellowed, and read the log for the first migration since records began.

Duck Migration Log Book

Duck Flight: Journey no.1, day 67

"Attention!" My voice trembled with excitement, like the autumn reeds swaying in the wilderness.

Using the V-formation, of which they were most proud, the Duck Brigade swept over the strange but attractive green marshes. That’s right! The marshes in the legendary waterbirds’ paradise: Formosa.

As the winter haven of our dreams opened before our eyes, we forgot the hunger in our guts, and our wings battered by the sea winds, and for a long time we were too excited to make a sound.

Enjoy! Close your eyes and feel the warmth on your face. Enjoy! Slip your beak slowly into the water, and let the food flow in.

"Oh, what a wonderful country!" Flying Southward Hsiang muttered, intoxicated by what he had read.

He closed the logbook gently, afraid of shattering the beautiful scene he had painstakingly woven in his mind. He wanted to take this image with him to the south. He understood that the ducks needed ideals to give them the courage to cross foreign seas.

Chapter 2: Ducks Devote Their Lives to Flying

The ducks set off and flew over the bright blue sea.

To escape the cold, they raced against the north wind. For a short break, they chased and caught up with cargo ships. To boost morale, they raced against other cheering geese and ducks. Only the wide-open sea encouraged them, painting a cheerleading scene with the waves' white spray. The island was kind too, providing them with a place to rest and a source of calories.

Duck Migration Log Book

Duck Flight: Journey no. 119, day 45

Brave ducks devoted their lives to flying.

Today, we lost 12 companions, including 1 from the vanguard.

When pioneer Guide Lu decided to stay behind on the island with his injured mother, the brigade's eyes filled with hot tears.

When ten companions' strength was depleted, and they lost speed and fell into the sea, the brigade paid the highest respect.

Remember! The ducks devote their lives to flying.

The ducks never doubted the direction they were flying in, however, a storm about to break on the horizon worried Flying Southward Hsiang.

In order to grasp the weather situation, he sent Beat the Wind Chen and Face the Rain Lin ahead as scouts.

At first, the sea breeze was surprisingly calm, and the migration brigade advanced silently towards the nearest reef.

Suddenly, it seemed as though a spell had been cast on the sky: a dark shadow hung all around.

Then, the dull roar of the wind in the distance brought heart-stopping news.

"The storm's heading this way!" a voice filled with terror shouted in the distance, though they could only hear the voice faintly.

"It's Beat the Wind Chen, the storm's heading this way!" Ears Alert Chien quickly pulled in his wings and turned around to report to brigade chief Flying Southward Hsiang.

Before Flying Southward Hsiang could react, he heard Clear Vision Chao shouting urgently, "Agh! Beat the Wind Chen and Face the Rain Lin are caught in the storm!"

"Quick! Take cover in the leeward side of the reef!" Flying Southward Hsiang issued an emergency order to the Migration Brigade.

At the same time, Quick Mover Li swerved and flew out about 10 meters, shouting: "I'm going to save Beat the Wind Chen and his group!"

"It's too dangerous!" Flying Southward Hsiang yelled instinctively.

A strong gust of wind halted Quick Mover Li's momentum, and sent him somersaulting through the air, back to where he'd come from.

The rain fell loud and hard, and the storm arrived at lightning speed. The curtain of wind and rain covering sky and earth shook not only the reef, but the grieving souls of the ducks on the leeward side of the reef as well.

Duck Migration Log Book

Duck Flight: Journey 119, day 55

After the Storm

Sunlight intensity: scorching

Losses reported:

(1) Deaths: 20, including 2 members of the vanguard

Cause of death: Fell into the sea

(2) Wing damage: 36.

Estimated distance to next resting place: 6 duck flying days

Special note: Ducks are helpless in a storm, but a storm will not affect the luster of life. Journey 119 will be great because of Beat the Wind Chen and Face the Rain Lin.

Chapter 3: A Little Girl is Crying

In preparation for the next six days of flying, the ducks were busy searching for food in the crevices of the reef. Even the noisy youngsters were unusually quiet that day – perhaps they were tired, or held back by the solemn atmosphere.

At dusk, Flying Southward Hsiang looked up into the distance, spread his wings, and felt the rise and fall of the wind.

"We can set out again tonight," he thought to himself.

"Someone's crying for help!" Ears Alert Chien suddenly shouted.

The ducks immediately stopped what they were doing, craned their necks and looked around.

Clear Vision Chao flapped his wings and flew up just high enough to see what was happening.

He reported what he saw to the ground: "A yacht hit the reef in a storm. It's leaking. It's south of here." Clear Vision Chao pulled in his wings, landed on a part of the reef that was above water, and said in a very cold tone of voice: "A human boat!"

"Are they in danger?" a young duck asked, with an element of curiosity and sympathy.

Clear Vision Chao nodded nonchalantly: "The boat's tilting, and losing power."

“What shall we do?” Another youngster asked keenly.

“Who cares about them! Hmph!” Quick Mover Li flew over and landed right in front of the youngsters. He flapped his wings to drive them away from the adults, so they couldn’t interfere.

The young ducks took a few steps back, then closed in again, clamoring to speak.

Ears Alert Chien repeated what he had just said: “There’s a little girl crying. There’s a child on the boat!” He was listening out for sounds from the boat.

“Poor thing, will she drown?” a youngster asked solemnly.

“She might starve to death!” added another youngster.

The young ducks all looked very sympathetic.

“Don’t worry about them!” Quick Mover Li looked as disdainful as ever, and the other older ducks continued to look silently for food, as though nothing had happened.

“If the little girl dies, her parents will be very upset.” The youngster thought that no one understood him, so he raised his voice, and sounded a bit angry.

“What do you know! When humans catch us, they never think about whether our relatives will be sad!” Quick Mover Li answered, raising his voice even louder.

The young ducks were so scared that they hid behind their parents, not daring to make another sound, but watching Flying Southward Hsiang very closely.

Flying Southward Hsiang stood up, and said calmly, “Perhaps we could offer some help.”

“But that doesn’t make sense. And we’re tired enough as it is, Captain!” Ears Alert Chien protested.

“We still have six hard days ahead, waiting for the others!” Clear Vision Chao reminded Flying Southward Hsiang.

“They never thought about our grief!” Quick Mover Li choked with emotion, as though he was pleading with Flying Southward Hsiang. He was thinking of his uncle.

Flying Southward Hsiang looked tenderly at the angry and indignant ducks until they all fell silent. Then, slowly but firmly, he said: “For the very reason that we understand the grief of losing a loved one, let’s go and lend a helping hand, OK?”