

# Tropical Holiday

You've heard that birds fly south for the winter. But, have you ever wondered where these birds go?

The Baltimore oriole is one bird species that migrates south each winter. Like many songbirds, they live and raise their young in North America during the summer. Feasting on insects, flower nectar, and berries, Baltimore orioles are a common sight in northeastern United States and in parts of Canada. In the late fall, when their natural food supply dwindles, they begin a startling journey south in search of warmer weather and food.

Imagine taking off from a place like Pennsylvania and flying over houses, trees, and highways all along the coastal states. Stopping only to sleep, eat, and drink, Baltimore orioles may travel over 1,000 miles before they reach the Gulf of Mexico. From there, they take the most direct route and fly straight over the Gulf in a single night – crossing 600 miles of open water!

About two weeks after leaving Pennsylvania, they arrive at their destination. For many Baltimore orioles, the Central American country of Honduras is their winter home. Others live in southern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

In Honduras, the Baltimore orioles announce their own arrival with their clear, full whistles. They roam about in small groups and spend the winter eating fruits, nectar,

and insects. From mid-November through February, they live at the edges of the tropical rainforest, but can also be found in cocoa, coffee, and banana plantations.

With so many birds eating in such a small area, food begins to become scarce again in late winter. So, the Baltimore orioles once again take flight.

On the return trip, the Baltimore orioles usually take an overland route. They fly over Central America and Mexico and up through Texas before finally arriving in Maryland or Pennsylvania again. When they return there in spring, they will complete a remarkable round-trip journey all the way to Central America and back!

Birds such as the Baltimore oriole are called *neotropical migrants* because they breed in North America and winter south of the U.S. border in Mexico and in Central and South America. An amazing 333 bird species migrate according to this pattern.

These birds depend on good feeding grounds in their summer range, and also in their wintering lands and along their migration route.

It may be hard to imagine, but many birds we see outside our windows in the spring and summer depend on tropical rainforests to survive.

