

# The Boy and the Mountain Birds



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Leo loved Saturdays best when they meant hiking. Today his family was climbing a mountain trail, and his green backpack held his favorite sketchbook and a sharp pencil. His mom wore her olive green rain jacket and carried a small camera. His dad, tall in a navy fleece and wide sun hat, held the map. The trail wound up through tall pine trees, and the air smelled sweet and clean.



Leo was eight years old, small and wiry, with light brown skin, short curly black hair, and warm brown eyes. A few freckles dotted his nose. He wore his red hooded jacket and blue jeans, and his brown hiking boots crunched on the gravel path. He kept his sketchbook open in one hand and his pencil ready in the other. "I want to draw every bird I see," he said.



Mom pointed to a rocky outcrop ahead. "Look, Leo! Mountain birds love places like that." Leo squinted and saw tiny shapes hopping on the grey rocks. They were sparrow-sized, with grey and white feathers and brown speckled backs. Their bright black eyes sparkled, and their tiny orange beaks pecked at the ground. Quick wings fluttered as they moved from rock to rock.



Leo sat on a flat stone and opened his sketchbook. He drew the birds as they hopped, their little feet gripping the rock. One bird tilted its head and looked right at him. Leo held still, patient and quiet. The bird flicked its tail and hopped closer. Leo's pencil moved softly, tracing the curve of its wing. He felt like a real explorer.



Dad reminded them to stay on the trail. "We don't want to step on nests or scare the birds," he said. Leo nodded and looked around. The birds were everywhere now—some hopping on rocks, some flitting between bushes. High above, others flew in wide circles, their wings catching the sunlight. Leo turned a new page and started sketching the flying birds, trying to catch their motion.



Mom knelt beside Leo and gently touched a rock. "Mountain birds need clean air," she said. "That's why the mountain is so special. The wind blows away smoke and dust." Leo drew a deep breath. The air was crisp and fresh, like cold water. He drew little swirls around his birds to show the clean air. "So they can breathe easily," he said. Mom smiled and clicked a photo.



They hiked higher, and the trees grew shorter and scrubbier. Leo saw a bird carrying a twig in its beak. It disappeared into a crack between rocks. "That's a nest," whispered Mom. "Mountain birds need safe nests to raise their babies." Leo sketched the bird peeking out from the crack, its bright eyes watchful. He drew the nest carefully, a cozy home hidden in stone.



Back on the trail, Dad picked up a crumpled wrapper someone had left behind. "Litter can hurt birds," he said, tucking it into his pocket. "We always leave the mountain cleaner than we found it." Leo thought about his birds and their safe nests. He picked up a shiny bottle cap and put it in his backpack. "I'll protect them too," he said. Dad gave him a thumbs-up.



At a bend in the trail, Leo heard a soft chirping. Two birds were chasing each other around a bush. They fluttered and hopped, playing a game only they understood. Leo laughed and drew them mid-hop. His pencil flew across the page. The birds' brown speckled backs looked like tiny pebbles, and their orange beaks were bright dots of color.



Leo noticed that the birds stayed away from the noisy part of the trail. "They like quiet places," he said. Mom nodded. "Mountain birds need quiet to hear each other and to feel safe." Leo drew a little bubble of quiet around his birds. He listened to the wind and the soft rustle of grass. The mountain felt peaceful, and Leo felt peaceful too. He wanted to keep it that way.



On a high ledge, Leo spotted a bird flying far above. It looked like a tiny speck against the blue sky. He drew it as a speck, then added more birds around it. "They fly so high," he said. "They must see everything." Mom smiled. "They see the whole mountain. And they need it to stay clean and safe." Leo looked down at his sketchbook. He had drawn so many birds today.



Leo sat on a rock and flipped through his pages. Each drawing showed a bird in its mountain home. He saw the hopping birds, the flying birds, the nest hidden in stone. "I didn't know birds could be so interesting," he said. "I love them." Dad sat beside him. "When you watch something closely, you start to care about it," he said. Leo nodded. He cared a lot now.



Mom pointed to a bird preening its feathers on a sunny rock. "That bird is cleaning itself," she said. "It needs clean air and clean water to stay healthy." Leo drew the bird with its beak buried in its feathers, and then added a sparkling stream nearby. He imagined the birds drinking and splashing. "We should keep the water clean too," he said. Mom hugged him.



On the way down, Leo picked up every piece of litter he saw. Dad helped, and Mom clicked photos of the beautiful mountain. Leo added a new drawing to his sketchbook: a bird flying over a clean trail, with a sign that said "Stay on the path." He drew it carefully. "This is how we protect them," he said. His pencil moved with purpose.



That evening, Leo sat at the kitchen table and colored his drawings. He used grey and white for the birds, brown for their speckled backs, and orange for their beaks. He drew a big mountain behind them, with clean air and safe nests. "I want to go back," he said. "And I want to help keep the mountain safe for the birds." His parents smiled.



Leo pinned his best drawing on the wall. It showed a little bird on a rock, with the mountain rising high behind it. Underneath, he wrote: "Protect the birds. Stay on trails. No litter." He looked at it and felt happy. The mountain was a special place, and now he knew how to take care of it. He couldn't wait for his next hiking trip. "The birds will be waiting," he whispered.