

Flights of Fancy: Defying Gravity by Design and Evolution

Richard Dawkins

Jana Lenzova, Illustrator

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A book about flying that includes “all the different ways of defying gravity that have been discovered by humans over the centuries and by other animals over millions of years,” Richard Dawkins’s *Flights of Fancy* also includes ruminations on the nature of flight, futurism, and flight-related digressions. Between its full-color illustrations and mathematical discussions of flight mechanics, this book is filled with ideas for all ages and offers multiple ways to become fascinated with flight.

An educational book pitched equally to children and adults, *Flights of Fancy* has the same wide appeal as an Attenborough nature documentary. Its fifteen chapters cover topics like moths whose wings are anti-sonar in a way that’s akin to stealth bombers, aerial plankton, and humanity’s colonization of space. Along the way, the book poses questions to its own arguments, like “If flying is so great, why do some animals lose their wings?”—a question that garners a chapter-length response.

In addition to lending his expertise as an evolutionary biologist, Dawkins allows his own fascinations, musings, and questions to shape the text. At times, he’s credulous about current scientific theories and popular thought. At others, he’s as excited as a school kid to contemplate extinct species, like the flightless terror bird and one of the largest birds ever to fly, *pelagornis*. Yet, whether for evolutionary adaptation or human creation, flight is presented as an economic compromise: life is cheap, so trade-offs are always being made in order to achieve long-term goals.

Dawkins notes that the “end products of human design and evolutionary design are both so good ... that we find it convenient to forget how different are the two processes of improvement.” *Flights of Fancy* finds a story in those trips and the amazing results that plants, animals, and engineers bring to bear through their diverse processes.

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