

How Buzzard Got His Feathers

A long time ago the birds had no clothing. They spoke like people, but they were shy and hid from sight. One day they decided to hold a great council. "We must go to Creator and ask him for clothing," said Eagle. So it was decided. But who would carry the message?

Many birds volunteered. But finally they chose Buzzard. He could fly great distances because of his long wings, and he could soar higher than any of the other birds and so come more easily to the sun-place, where Creator lived. All of the birds burned tobacco and sent their prayers up to creator, and then buzzard set out on his way.

It was a long journey. Buzzard flew and flew. He ate the food he had carried with him and still he was far from the place of Creator. He became hungry, so hungry that he stopped and ate some dead fish washed up on the shore below him. They were rotten and smelled bad. But his hunger was great, and he did not notice.

He continued on his way. Now he was close to the sun-place; he went higher and higher. It grew fiery hot from the sun, but still he flew up and up. The skin on top of his naked head burned red in the sun's heat, but at last he came to the place of Creator.

"I have been waiting for you," Creator said, "because I have heard the prayers of the birds. I will give you clothes made of fine feathers to take back." Then he showed Buzzard the clothing he had prepared. It was fine indeed. There were as many colors in the feathers as there are in the rainbow snake that arches across the sky after a rain, and the feathers shone so brightly that Buzzard had to turn his eyes away from them.

"Now," Creator said, "I know how hard it was for you to fly to me. You may have the first choice of all these suits of feathers. Remember, though, you may try on each suit only once."

Buzzard was very pleased. "I must choose the finest feathers," he said to himself. "Then everyone will see them and always remember it was I who brought back clothing for the birds."

He tried on a suit of bright blue and white feathers with a jaunty cap. "No," he said, taking it off, "not bright enough." And so that suit went to Blue Jay.

He tried on another suit of brilliant red and black with a tall crest. "No," he said, "I do not look good in red." And so that suit went to Cardinal.

He tried on another suit of gray and black with a scarlet vest. Again he was not satisfied, and that suit went to robin.

He put on a suit as yellow as the sun with handsome dark markings. "Too much black on this one," he said, and that suit went to Goldfinch.

Creator patiently watched Buzzard trying on one suit after another. None of them were right. Sometimes the feathers were too long. Sometimes they were not long enough. Some were too dark, others too light. None of them seemed to be just right for the messenger of all the birds.

Finally Buzzard put on a suit of clothes that was too small for him. Although all of the other clothes had grown larger or smaller to fit whatever bird chose them, this last suit of feathers was very tight. Buzzard pulled and strained. Finally he got it on. It left his legs and his neck bare; the red skin of his bald head remained uncovered. He looked at the suit. Not fine. Not fine at all. The feathers hardly had any color--just a dirty brown. They were not shiny and neat like the others. Buzzard was not pleased, "This is the worst of all." he said.

Creator smiled. "Buzzard," he said, "it is the only suit left. Now it will have to be yours."

And so to this day you can see Buzzard wearing the suit that he earned for himself. He still eats things long dead because of what he ate on his journey to the place of Creator. And though some make fun of the way he looks, Buzzard still remembers that he was the only one who could make that long journey.

Even in his suit of dirty feathers that fits him badly, even with his head burned scarlet from the heat of the sun, he remembers that he was chosen be the messenger for all the birds. When he circles high in the sky, he is close to Creator. Then, even in his ill fitting suit of feathers, he is proud.