

The crews of the three ships were puzzled. Why did their admiral spend so much time watching the sky?

The sailors knew why he watched the sky at night. As long as men had sailed the seas they had used the stars to check their direction.

And they could understand why he watched the sky on clear days. Sailors measured the height of the sun to help them plot their ship's course. But their admiral watched the sky constantly. He looked just as hard on cloudy days and nights as on clear ones. Why?

Finally one of the men asked him. "Why do you study the sky so carefully, sir? What are you looking for?"

"Birds," the admiral answered.

The man looked even more puzzled. "Are you serious, sir? There are no birds in the middle of the ocean. We have seen no birds since a few days after we left land."

The admiral nodded in agreement. "But we will see them again when we near land," he said. "In fact, they will show us where to find it. We will watch the direction from which they come and the direction to which they fly. In that direction we will find land."

Later the sailor told the other men what the admiral had said. It did not make them feel much better. Some even grew frightened.

"I have sailed many times," one man said. "Always there were birds. Where are we that no birds fly?"

"We must be very far from land," another added. "We must be at the very edge of the world."

"We are lost!" cried a third.

But the man who had talked to the admiral was not afraid. "As long as we see the North Star we are not lost," he reminded them. "We can always find our way back home."

That made them feel a bit happier, but nevertheless they all began to look for birds. One Sunday in September a shout rang out: "We have sighted two birds!"

"Birds!" cried the other sailors. "We cannot be far from land now."

Before the week ended, three singing birds came to sit on the rigging. They were like no birds the men had ever seen before. The next Sunday a turtle dove flew over the ship. On October 4 the sailors counted forty sparrows. But still no land.

On the night of October 11 the admiral could not sleep. He was sure land was near. The sea looked different—smelled different. The wind carried the smell of land. To the west he saw a light. Was it really a light—the torch of some fisherman or traveler? He was so eager to find land that he could not trust his eyes.

Dawn brought the answer. In the dimness of early morning the sailors saw trees. From those trees birds were flying, some heading out toward the little ships now at anchor.

When the admiral and the captains of the other two ships stepped on shore, they knelt and kissed the ground. Overhead the birds sang happily to welcome Admiral Christopher Columbus and his crew to the New World.

## CHECK YOUR READING

1. The sailors were puzzled because their admiral watched the sky on
  - A clear nights
  - B cloudy nights
  - C sunny days
2. By studying the stars and sun, sailors could
  - A set and follow a course
  - B find out where birds were
  - C tell when winds would blow
3. The last time the ship's crew had seen birds was when they had
  - A become lost
  - B left land
  - C reached midocean
4. The admiral told the sailor that birds would help them find
  - A wind
  - B fish
  - C land
5. The fact that they had seen no birds made the sailors feel
  - A excited
  - B puzzled
  - C afraid
6. The sailors knew that they could use the North Star to find the
  - A edge of the world
  - B way to go home
  - C land that was nearest
7. The admiral could tell when land was near because the sea
  - A looked blacker
  - B sounded wilder
  - C smelled different
8. The ship's crew first saw the New World in
  - A September
  - B October
  - C November
9. The fact that the admiral kissed the ground shows that he was
  - A surprised
  - B thankful
  - C frightened
10. The number of ships that finally reached the New World was
  - A one
  - B two
  - C three