

# Blue Eggs

by John Dekker



This text is levelled at Gold 1.

## Overview

This report describes the life cycle of a song thrush, how the song thrush came to New Zealand, and why some people consider this bird to be a problem.

This text provides opportunities for students to find and summarise information and to consider different points of view. There is an audio version of the text on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2010*.

## Related texts

- Texts about birds, for example, at Purple: *Duckling Palace* (RTR), “The Magpie Tree” (JJ 18)
- Other examples of reports at Gold: *Extraordinary Earthworms*, *The White-tailed Spider*, *Sun Bears Are Special*, *The Greatest Race on Earth* (RTR), “Wild Orphans” (JJ 41), “Dancing Bees” (JJ 36).

## Cross-curriculum links

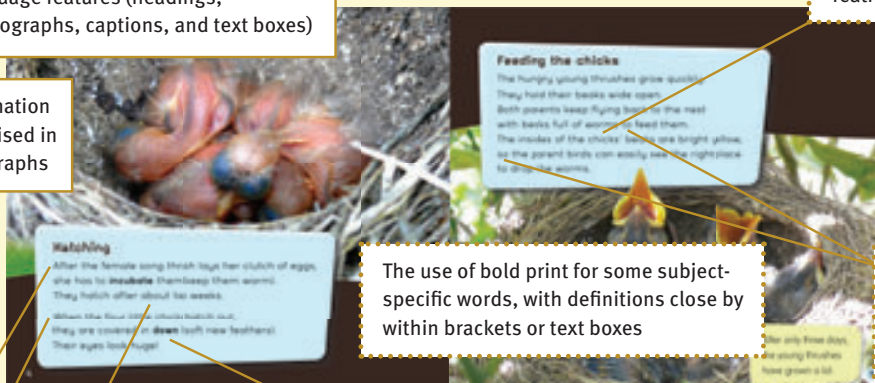
Science (levels 1 and 2, life processes) – Recognise that all living things have certain requirements so they can stay alive.

## Text characteristics

Key text characteristics as described in the reading standard for after three years at school are shown in the boxes with a solid outline. Other boxes indicate additional characteristics.

The information about the song thrush in both the body text and visual language features (headings, photographs, captions, and text boxes)

Information organised in paragraphs



The structure of the text as a report, with an introduction, a series of main points, and a conclusion

The use of possessive apostrophes to clarify the subject of some sentences (“other birds’ nests”, “the chicks’ beaks”, “the chicks’ feathers”, “birds’ songs”)

A variety of sentence structures, including complex sentences

The use of bold print for some subject-specific words, with definitions close by within brackets or text boxes

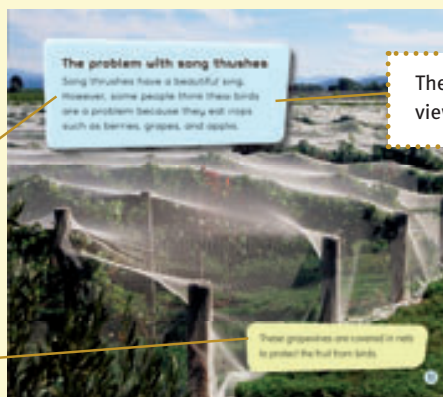
Words such as “Like”, “But”, “to” (as in “full of worms to feed them”), “so”, “because”, and “such as” to signal links between ideas

Indicators of time to clarify the sequence of events in the life cycle, for example, “about a week”, “After”, “when they are eleven to fifteen days old”, “for several more weeks”, “During this time”, “When spring comes again”

Some common words that have multiple meanings (“clutch”, “down”, “family”)

The contrasting points of view about the song thrush

Some use of the more formal vocabulary and language structures of non-fiction writing, for example, “The female song thrush”, “the parent birds”, “continue to feed”, “several”, “the thrush family of birds”, “a type of thrush”, “However”, “some people think”, “are covered in”, “to protect”



Some unfamiliar words and phrases, the meaning of which is supported by the context or illustrations, for example, “song thrush”, “clutch”, “female”, “twigs”, “mud lining”, “incubate”, “hatch”, “down”, “chirp”, “snail shells”, “omnivores” (which includes the prefix “omni”), “raise”, “type”, “settlers”, “England”, “crops”, “protect”

## Suggested reading purpose

- To find out about the song thrush's life cycle and form an opinion about it.

## Setting a learning goal

*(What opportunities does this text provide for students to learn more about how to “read, respond to, and think critically about” texts?)*

To meet the reading purpose, students need to draw on a range of comprehension and processing strategies, often simultaneously. The strategies, knowledge, and skills below link to *The Literacy Learning Progressions*. Select and adapt from them to set your specific learning goal. Be guided by your students' particular needs and experiences: who they are, where they come from, and what they bring (*Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1–8*, Knowledge of the learner, page 6).

This text provides opportunities for students to:

- make connections between sections of the text and between the body text, photographs, and other visual language features to find information (summarise)
- use word-solving strategies (for example, using grapho-phonetic information, knowledge of word structure, and context or looking for definitions and explanations) to decode and work out the meaning of unfamiliar words
- use knowledge of punctuation and syntax to track ideas in long or complex sentences and to clarify the meaning of the more formal language of the report
- think critically (evaluate).

## Introducing the text

- Look at the front cover. *What questions do you have about these eggs?* Encourage the students to share any prior knowledge.
- Have the students look through the book, reading the headings, to predict what the book will tell them.
- To support the students with the vocabulary, especially English language learners, you could give each pair of students a different copy of a photograph from the text and ask them to label what they can. Create a vocabulary list together and then do the activity again after the lesson and add new vocabulary to the chart.
- *What text features are likely to help us read and understand this text?* (for example, the body text, headings, text boxes, photographs, bold print for new words)
- Share the reading purpose and learning goal.

## Reading the text

Below are some behaviours you could expect to see as the students read and discuss this text.

Each example is accompanied by instructional strategies to scaffold their learning. Select and adapt from the suggestions according to your students' needs and experiences.

### **The students use the photos and headings plus their prior knowledge to ask questions and then look for answers as they read.**

- Have the students read page 2 to find out which bird the eggs belong to.
- Draw attention to the heading on page 3. Explain that asking questions as they read can help them focus and find information. Have the students create a question using the heading as a guide. For example, “How does the song thrush build its nest?” Then have them look for the answer (in the text and photographs) as they read.
- Draw out the idea that some questions are more useful than others when reading an information text. For example, a less useful question for page 3 would be “Who built this nest?” because it's already clear that it was built by a song thrush.
- Have the students continue to read the text this way, using each heading to generate a question before they read. You could record their questions (and answers) on a chart, or they could work in pairs.
- As a group, discuss what sorts of questions they are finding most useful.

### **The students make connections between sections of the text and between the body text and visual language features to identify and summarise the main points in the life cycle of the song thrush.**

- Remind the students to use both body text and visual language features, such as the photographs and text boxes, to find information. For example, the photographs on pages 4–8 convey a lot of information about what the birds look like as they grow.
- Set up a chart to record (and sequence) the main events in the life cycle. Note that the text is not in sequence because it begins with a focus on the eggs, then goes back to building the nest. See if the students notice and sort this out. The students can either use the headings from the text and search for the indicators of time or vice versa. A partially complete possible example is provided below.
- Provide support by modelling how to fill in the chart for pages 2–3. Then have the students work through the text in pairs or small groups.

- Monitor their discussions. At intervals, reconvene as a group to fill in the graphic organiser with the main events in the life cycle. Encourage the students to check their ideas by rereading and making connections between sections of the text.

Event	How long does it take?
The female song thrush builds a nest.	about a week (page 2)
The female song thrush lays three to five eggs.	
The female incubates the eggs.	about two weeks
The birds hatch. They are mostly pink with huge blue eyes and soft down.	
Both parents feed the chicks.	
The chicks are much bigger. They have yellow beaks and proper feathers, but they can't fly yet.	after three days
The chicks hardly fit in the nest. They are loud, and their feathers have grown.	after ten days

- Revisit the reading purpose and the learning goal and support the students to summarise how they met it. *What helped you to find information about the song thrush?*

**The students use word-solving strategies (for example, using grapho-phonetic information, knowledge of word structure, and context or looking for definitions and explanations) to decode and/or work out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases.**

- Prompt students to “break up” multisyllabic words into recognisable chunks or syllables, for example, “in-cu-bate”, “om-ni-vores”. You can model this on a whiteboard.
- Use a think-aloud to model strategies for working out word meanings. For example, on page 4: *I can see the word “incubate” in bold print here, and there are words in brackets next to it, so I’m inferring that the bracketed words are*

*explaining the meaning – that to incubate means to keep something warm. Or, on page 9: I can see the word “omnivores” in bold print. Bold print usually means that there is a definition close by. The next sentence describes what the birds eat. I know that “carnivores” are meat-eaters and “herbivores” are plant-eaters. This list has meat and plants in it, so I’m inferring that omnivores eat both meat and plants.*

- You may need to prompt students to notice the difference between the meanings of “family” on pages 9 and 10. On page 10, it is used in a more formal scientific way.
- Have a dictionary available to confirm or clarify word meanings.

**The students use their knowledge of punctuation and syntax to track ideas in long or complex sentences and to clarify the meaning of the more formal language of the report.**

- Many of the sentences in this text are complex and include indicators of time. A complex sentence is one that includes at least one dependent clause (a clause that has no meaning outside the sentence). Write one or two of the complex sentences on a chart or group reading book to demonstrate how commas help to separate clauses and clarify meaning. For example, “After the female song thrush lays her clutch of eggs, she has to incubate them (keep them warm).” “When the four little chicks hatch out, they are covered in down (soft feathers).”
- As they read, prompt the students to look for words that link ideas in sentences, for example, “But”, “to” (as in “full of worms to feed them”), “so”, “because”, and “such as”.
- Explain the use of possessive apostrophes to identify the subject of some sentences. In all of the following examples, the apostrophe comes after the “s” because the items belong to plural subjects. For example, the nests belong to “other birds” (page 3); the beaks and feathers belong to “the chicks” (pages 5 and 6); and the songs belong to “the birds” (page 10).

**The students offer an opinion about song thrushes, based on information in the text and their prior knowledge, and can give a reason for their opinion.**

- Direct the students to read pages 10–12 to identify positive and negative information about song thrushes. Encourage them to make connections with any other information they recall from the text (including the photographs).

- Focus on the body text on page 11. *Using what you already know about birds plus the information in this text, what is your opinion of the song thrush?*
- Encourage debate (and reference to the text) as the students share their opinions. Some students may notice some less obvious information, for example, the fact that the birds eat both worms and snails. To support your students, especially English language learners, you could use a speaking frame to show the students a way they can give their opinions and reasons. Model a sentence, for example, *I think song thrushes are pests because they eat crops.* Then write your sentence into a speaking frame like the one below. Take out the optional parts of the sentence and have the students create their own sentences.

Give your opinion	I think song thrushes are _____
Give a reason	because they _____.

Depending on the needs of your students, you could provide a frame with the right hand column blank.

### After reading

- The students can reread the text silently while listening to the audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2010*.
- Discuss the meanings of some of the subject-specific vocabulary and how the students worked them out, for example, by looking for contextual clues or definitions. You could focus on some of the topic words that have more than one meaning (“clutch”, “down”, “family”). *What helped you work out the right meaning?* Note if you need to follow up on any decoding strategies, particular words, or features of words.
- Study some of the examples of the language of report writing, for example, “the parent birds” on page 5 or “continue to feed” on page 8. Have the students practise substituting less formal language, for example, “mother and father birds” and “keep feeding”, in order to clarify the meaning. Draw out the idea that report writing is more formal than personal writing.
- Encourage the students to think beyond the text (think critically), making connections to what they know about other birds that may be

considered a problem, for example, the loud mimicry of some tūī, the aggressive behaviour of magpies, or the large numbers of pigeons who cluster in and pollute public places.