

How Thunderbird Came to Be From "The Medicine Wheel" by Sun Bear and Wabun

Once there was a big hawk, the biggest hawk that had ever lived on the earth. This hawk was so big that his wings darkened two lodges when he flew over the village. Luckily for the people, this hawk was good and kindly toward all those who were around him.

Besides being big, this hawk was also very powerful. He could sing a special song and all of the hawks from all over the territory would come to counsel with him. He could sing another that would catch any rain clouds that were in the vicinity and bring them in toward him. It was even said that he had a song that would make mice and rabbits jump up into his talons when he circled low over the earth. He was a very powerful hawk.

This hawk was so powerful that the Thunder Beings one time decided to give him a special song that he could sing that would draw them to him. They told him that to sing that song correctly he first had to build a circular lodge large enough for himself and all of the other animals he wanted to invite to hear the song. They told him that he had to make a circular altar of a special kind and put particular things from the mineral, the plant and the animal kingdoms on it. They told him that he had to give thanks to the Great Spirit before he sang this song and that he had to feel gratitude to the Thunderers for sharing their power with him.

One summer he decided to sing this song, so he did as the Thunderers had told him. He invited some hawks, an eagle, two ravens, a vulture and an osprey to come into the lodge with him. They accepted, and when the song was done and the Thunderers had come, they all left the lodge knowing that they had been given special power from having heard the song.

Big Hawk had gathered remarkable powers to him, and now a touch of his wings could heal his friends from even the gravest wounds. All of the power that he had became too much for Big Hawk, and instead of remembering to give thanks every morning to the Great Spirit, he began to get huffed up and to go around singing, "I am the most powerful hawk of them all. I am great Kaik Kaik Kaik."

The Great Spirit looked at the hawk and was patient, hoping that he would remember. But he did not. He just got more and more huffed up.

The next summer he decided that, once again, he would sing the song of the Thunder Beings so he could get even more power. He decided that he was so powerful he didn't have to bother building the lodge or making the preparations he had been told to make. He didn't even bother to give thanks to the Great Spirit or to the Thunderers. This time he invited all the birds and animals who would come to witness his power.

He began to sing his song just sitting in his nest in the biggest tree around, and he preened himself and huffed himself up more as the Thunderers approached. Suddenly, a bolt of lightning shot out from one of the clouds and burst into a ball of flame just as it

touched the tip of Big Hawk's wing. Just as suddenly, the ball of flame and the hawk disappeared before any of the other animals were hurt. All those who had been there looked around, not believing their eyes.

Big Hawk found himself up in the sky talking with the Great Spirit.

"Big Haw," said the Great Spirit, "you have become too arrogant. You forget to give your thanks. You forget the ceremonies that you have been given. You forget the real source of your power. Since you have insulted the Thunder Beings by misusing the gift that they gave to you, you will now become their servant. You will still be a big handsome bird, but you'll no longer be able to call the thunder. Now they will call you. Whenever the Thunderers go out to do their work, you will go with them. So you don't get too huffed up from people seeing you, you will always be hidden partly behind the clouds. You'll appear to some as a strange cloud formation. You'll appear to others as a fiery shape created by the lightning. Only those with very clear sight will see you as you are, as the bird of fire, the Thunderbird. Go now, and serve those you have hurt until you learn the pleasure that can come from serving and from remembering your place in the universe."

And so the Thunderbird came to the people.