

ONE SMALL STEP



Jennifer Monson (far right, with members of her troupe) Brooklyn, New York
Choreographer and creator of the Bird Brain Dance Project, age 42

Birds of a Feather

"Where I live, people fly a lot of homing pigeons. In the evenings I have watched bird formations spiral up, catch the light, suddenly turn white, and then disappear for a moment. Looking at this, I started thinking about navigation. In 2000 I created the Pigeon Project, the first of my Bird Brain Dance efforts, based on these experiences. The next year our tour was inspired by the migratory patterns of gray whales. In 2002, it was ospreys.

"I'm now focused on the flocking behavior of ducks and geese for spring 2004. I'm working with schools in Dallas, Houston, and Minneapolis. From September to the beginning of the tour, which follows the birds' migration path, students will do one Bird Brain-related activity a month. They'll go birdwatching with a volunteer or do some navigational activity. I'm also work-

ing with the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis to develop a resource guide that will teach about migration and navigation through dance.

"I start each of my Bird Brain events by asking the audience to close their eyes and orient themselves to north, or the ocean, or their home. We do a few other exercises and then start dancing. After the performances, there is a panel discussion with scientists, naturalists, sometimes poets.

"Dancing is powerful; it's how I experience my own wildness. My hope is that the audience gets turned on to the navigational phenomenon of birds, and how crucial it is to preserve and protect bird habitat. I want people to think about how their actions and their community can affect the birds that are stopping to rest near them." —interview by Marilyn Berlin Snell



SAFE HAVEN: New Jersey was the first state to ban DDT, in 1968, but residual damage from the pesticide and from habitat loss landed the osprey on the state's endangered-species list six years later. Citizen groups built nesting platforms for the birds, which use them to rest during migration. Since 1974, the number of osprey pairs in the Garden State has rebounded from 68 to 340.

► **ON THE WEB** Visit www.birdbraindance.org or www.birdlife.net.

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