



In the Field, Among the Feathered: A History of Birders and Their Guides

Thomas R. Dunlap

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America is a nation of ardent, knowledgeable birdwatchers. But how did it become so? And what role did the field guide play in our passion for spotting, watching, and describing birds?

In the Field, Among the Feathered tells the history of field guides to birds in America from the Victorian era to the present, relating changes in the guides to shifts in science, the craft of field identification, and new technologies for the mass reproduction of images. Drawing on his experience as a passionate birder and on a wealth of archival research, Thomas Dunlap shows how the twin pursuits of recreation and conservation have inspired birders and how field guides have served as the preferred method of informal education about nature for well over a century.

The book begins with the first generation of late 19th-century birdwatchers who built the hobby when opera glasses were often the best available optics and bird identification was sketchy at best. As America became increasingly urban, birding became more attractive, and with Roger Tory Peterson's first field guide in 1934, birding grew in both popularity and accuracy. By the 1960s recreational birders were attaining new levels of expertise, even as the environmental movement made birding's other pole, conservation, a matter of human health and planetary survival. Dunlap concludes by showing how recreation and conservation have reached a new balance in the last 40 years, as scientists have increasingly turned to amateurs, whose expertise had been honed by the new guides, to gather the data they need to support habitat preservation.

Putting nature lovers and citizen-activists at the heart of his work, Thomas Dunlap offers an entertaining history of America's long-standing love affair with birds, and with the books that have guided and informed their enthusiasm.



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