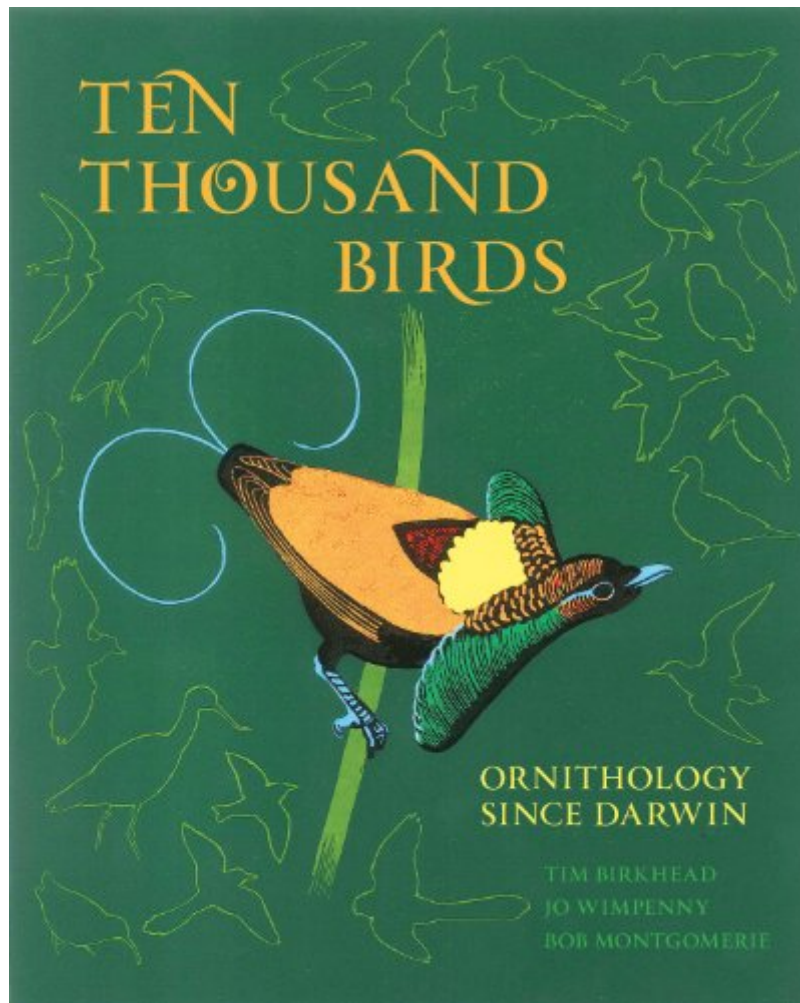


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Ten Thousand Birds: Ornithology Since Darwin



Synopsis

Ten Thousand Birds provides a thoroughly engaging and authoritative history of modern ornithology, tracing how the study of birds has been shaped by a succession of visionary and often-controversial personalities, and by the unique social and scientific contexts in which these extraordinary individuals worked. This beautifully illustrated book opens in the middle of the nineteenth century when ornithology was a museum-based discipline focused almost exclusively on the anatomy, taxonomy, and classification of dead birds. It describes how in the early 1900s pioneering individuals such as Erwin Stresemann, Ernst Mayr, and Julian Huxley recognized the importance of studying live birds in the field, and how this shift thrust ornithology into the mainstream of the biological sciences. The book tells the stories of eccentrics like Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, a pathological liar who stole specimens from museums and quite likely murdered his wife, and describes the breathtaking insights and discoveries of ambitious and influential figures such as David Lack, Niko Tinbergen, Robert MacArthur, and others who through their studies of birds transformed entire fields of biology. Ten Thousand Birds brings this history vividly to life through the work and achievements of those who advanced the field. Drawing on a wealth of archival material and in-depth interviews, this fascinating book reveals how research on birds has contributed more to our understanding of animal biology than the study of just about any other group of organisms.

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Customer Reviews

The bird blogs that I follow have all been a flurry with praise for Ten Thousand Birds. The mix of science, history, personality, and human interest is unique and on that people find highly appealing. I was going to wait until it came to my public library, but the anticipation finally got to me. I am actually so pleased to have this gorgeous book in my personal collection not only for its physical qualities but its intellectual value. Never in recent history has there been such a complete book at the history of ornithology! I love this book because its all about the process. Each chapter focuses on different areas of understanding birds and the history of advancements within that focus. If you looked into migration for example, you'll find the vast array of hypotheses and tests performed in the 20th century fascinating! I should start looking for a birding guide for my homeland of Vermont, but until then, I am totally satisfied with Sheri Amsel's beautiful Vermont Nature Guide.

This fascinating and beautiful book is a must for anyone with a serious interest in birds, ornithology and evolutionary theory. Topics covered include: the debates surrounding the evolutionary origins of birds; the speciation process; classification; migration; breeding behaviour; sexual selection; learned and instinctive behaviour; population studies; and conservation. But the book does not just feature the birds and the science. It also tells the story of the human personalities involved in the development of ornithology since Darwin. For example, there is Ernst Mayr, who was both a field ornithologist and also one of the most important evolutionary theorists of the twentieth century. Mayr was still writing books on evolution when he was in his nineties, and his ideas were particularly important in explaining speciation: the process through which a new species branches off from an already existing one. Mayr wrote that "œ... birds are a marvelous stepping-stone in three directions: towards evolution, towards systematics, and towards biogeography." • Then there are Peter and Rosemary Grant, who carried out a long-term study of the finches on the Galapagos Islands, a study which (like Mayr's theoretical approach) revealed much about the speciation process through which the finches have diversified. I'll just mention one more of the many interesting characters from the book, and that is Rachel Carson. Carson's book "œSilent Spring" (1962) played a crucial role in bringing to public attention the damage being done by DDT and other

pesticides. For her pains, she was subjected to vicious attacks by the agrochemical industry and its hired intellectual thugs. This book is not cheap, but it is well worth the money. I strongly recommend it. Phil Webster. (England)

A spectacular social and scientific history of ornithology, highlighting controversies and their outcomes as the discipline matured. The illuminations of key figures are especially fascinating. Every modern bird person, no matter his or her level of engagement with ornithology, will enjoy and benefit from this major contribution.

The info is comprehensive & impressive, but by far the most enjoyable part was the thumbnail biographies at the end of each chapter. A wonderful read and a great resource that I will enjoy referring to for years to come.

Fantastic Compendium of the history of ornithology with great comments and beautiful pictures. All you need is this volume and a copy of Sibley's Guide to North American Birds to be a satisfied bird watcher in this part of the world.

This is an interesting book, if you are REALLY into birds.

Almost everything you ever wanted to know about ornithologists, but heavily weighted with Brits and "continentals".

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