

BIRD THERAPY

Harkness, J. 2020. Unbound. London, UK. 272 pp. Paperback: ISBN 13: 9781783528981. \$25.50 CAD

In *Bird Therapy*, Joe Harkness narrates his personal struggles with mental illness and a return to his childhood pastime of bird watching that supported his journey to a healthier life. It is now well known that spending time in nature is good for our general health, beyond the obvious benefits of fresh air and exercise. As the author explains, bird watching develops mindfulness, a heightened sense of observation, and a connection with the environment. These skills are cultivated while learning how to observe birds and serve as essential mechanisms for general well-being. The imagery and emotions the author works so hard to evoke seem particularly powerful when his bird watching is set to the backdrop of the rugged coasts of the North Sea. Harkness describes marine bird watching as a “true, multi-sensory experience”—the ultimate exercise in mindfulness.

Each chapter of *Bird Therapy* is an account of a significant instance in Harkness’ life where the practice of bird watching helped him understand himself, other people, birds, and the world. At the end of most chapters, the author provides tips to enrich the reader’s bird-watching practice by learning to see, listen, connect, and give back. At first, these practical tips seem to be mostly directed to the novice birder: “take time to notice the intricacies of feather patterns and markings”, “investigate local bird groups or clubs, as they can widen your local birdwatching network with others who share your interest”, and “engage in citizen science”. To the experienced birder, they evoke the nostalgia of discovering the world of birding for the first time. Yet, seemingly simple tips can also help the reader practice conscious and deliberate mindfulness while out doing their favourite hobby: “Pay attention to how being outside and engaging with birds makes you feel. Harness positive experiences and try to recognize what makes them so.” These therapeutic ways of experiencing birding could be beneficial to even the most accomplished birder.

The writing reflects the meandering style and comfort Harkness finds in the unpredictability of bird watching. He shares his love for his “patch” and recommends that readers find their own patch close to home, where they can get to know the bird community and develop a sense of place. He also encourages readers to practice bird watching during any season and to not be afraid of inclement weather, as this can provide opportunities to observe different behaviours and species. Anyone who has spent significant time in the field can attest to the feeling of joy that birdwatching can bring, regardless of how miserable conditions may be. A frigid cold bird walk in the depths of Canadian winter would be well worth it for a glimpse of a beautiful snowy owl.

This book represents the increasingly understood connection between two major contemporary issues: mental health and the environment. As anxiety and depression become ever more prevalent in our society, we are often advised to get more exercise, get outdoors, and practice mindfulness. When actually faced with these instructions however, many struggle to find the motivation

to do so. Harkness illustrates how good mental health practices are an inherent part of birding, a hobby which naturally helps develop better habits. While initially he uses birding reactively, as a sort of self-medication meant to alleviate acute mental distress, eventually this practice became a habitual part of his routine and contributor to his overall health, both physically and mentally.

Although not always explicitly mentioned, throughout this book it is impossible for the reader to miss the importance that bird habitat plays in well-being. Granted, there is mention of impressive locales, like the dramatic British seaside, but relatively unremarkable bits of nature are just as essential to finding happiness. It is evident from Harkness’ account that the ordinary small patches of green space that still remain scattered throughout the urban and developing landscapes are fundamental to his overall health. *Bird Therapy* puts into words this inherent value of nature, which is often hard to quantify amongst academics discussing concepts such as ecosystem services. Even though conservation efforts often focus on large parks and untouched wilderness areas, this book highlights the importance of smaller patches, both for the sake of biodiversity and for human mental health. The author’s entire connection to nature and his subsequent healing were anchored within these small patches. Clearly, disregarding the undeniable value of conserving small patches of green space would be a mistake.

Avid birders and nature enthusiasts will recognize and appreciate their passion put into words. The reading experience reflects the message the author is trying to send—take your time and enjoy the little details. Those who are familiar with mindfulness may recognize a new outlet for their practice, with the added potential of exploring a new hobby and perhaps even contributing to conservation. In a world which is increasingly disconnected from nature, some may appreciate the guidance this book provides to reestablishing that connection in a tangible way.

The author, and countless others throughout the book, found healing rooted in their connection with nature. Harkness was fortunate to have an early introduction to the joys of being outside, and to later rediscover it as an adult. Others are not so fortunate, as increasingly urbanized populations are more disconnected from nature. With increasing rates of mental health issues, we need to acknowledge the services that even the smallest patches of nature provide for us. *Bird Therapy* reminds us of the importance of these connections, and the simple pleasures that nature can provide when green space is made accessible to all.

Allison D. Binley, Department of Biology, Carleton University,
1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 5B6, Canada,
allisonbinley@gmail.carleton.ca

Jaimie G. Vincent, Department of Biology, Carleton University,
1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 5B6, Canada,
jaimievincent@gmail.carleton.ca

GULLS SIMPLIFIED: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO IDENTIFICATION

Dunne, P. and K. T. Carlson. 2019. Princeton University Press. Princeton, NJ, USA. 208 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-691-15694-1. \$24.95

As somebody who has spent countless hours studying gulls by sitting in bird blinds or crouching behind driftwood logs, I was intrigued by the premise and promise of *Gulls Simplified: A Comparative Approach to Identification*. Dunne and Carlson are not gull experts or gull-lovers, which they say makes them uniquely qualified to wade into the gull-watching fray. Unlike the authors, I AM a self-professed, card-carrying larophile. However, unlike, gull identification experts (lar-ID-ophiles?), my affection for this group stems from extensive time in the field observing their fierce parental drive, creative foraging habits, and even relatively mundane yet endearing loafing and nesting behaviors. Despite enjoying gulls primarily as individuals, I am still an avid birdwatcher and can appreciate the draw of trying to figure out the species of an odd-looking gull among the hundreds on coastal beaches. I have even flocked with others to catch glimpses of wayward individual Swallow-tailed and Ross's Gulls that were visiting Puget Sound (alas, the latter was dispatched by a bald eagle before I was able to see it!).

In their book, Dunne and Carlson put forward an identification scheme that, as they have done with hawk identification, relies on general impression, size, and shape rather than the details of plumage variation. I appreciate an approach that simplifies species identification by emphasizing the most likely species to be seen at a location (rather than the rarities), and second, by focusing on size, posture, behavior, and direct comparison. As they outline in the introduction, gull identification in North America is a complicated affair: 22 regularly occurring and a few vagrant species; similar sizes and plumages; multi-year plumage succession; and variable molting patterns. Add hybridization and its resultant intermediate characteristics to this ID-confounding list, and it bolsters the authors' argument for simplifying the process of gull identification. Especially since they were told "gulls could not be simplified!"

Following the introduction and discussion of traditional gull identification problems, there are some two dozen species accounts. These range from the smaller and hooded to the larger gulls, as well as a handful of "dark-horse gulls"—species unlikely to be seen in North America, but you should be aware of them. There's also a

helpful section on hybrid gulls, which includes a description of this tendency in overlapping gull species as "likely and problematic." I particularly enjoyed the italicized notes at the beginning of each species account, such as for the California Gull (*It's a Herring Gull drawn by El Greco with a Mormon cricket in its mouth.*) and the Laughing Gull (*It's the medium-sized, charcoal gray-backed gull with the last of your boardwalk hot dog in its mouth and three noisy accomplices standing nearby.*) The accounts are followed by a Quiz and Review, which is fun and challenging, and an Appendix with answers to quiz questions posed throughout the book. Throughout, there are photographs depicting gulls in all of their confusing, ambiguous splendor. For field guides, I generally find drawings preferable to photographs for help with animal identification, as photographs provide you with one view under one set of lighting circumstances. But this book is not a field guide, *per se*; rather, it relies on lengthy descriptions of size, shape, distribution, and habits, plus a series of photographs to effectively demonstrate variation among and within species. The plethora of photographs also nicely supports the discussion in the text. The index and bibliography are a bit lean, but it does not detract from the book's utility. One can always consult the *Birds of North America* species accounts for gory details.

This book would be a welcome addition to most birder's libraries. Intermediate and advanced birders could test and ground-truth the author's premise, and beginners would find it helpful to learn about identifying a challenging bird group and a potential way to not throw up your hands in dismay. This is neither a coffee table book to flip through in your living room (although you could); nor is it a weatherproof book to drag with you into the field (although you could do that too). It is probably best kept in the car for consulting after you trudge back from the field, full of impressions, observations, and of course, a newfound or long-standing appreciation for this bird group.

Thomas P. Good, NOAA Fisheries/Northwest Fisheries Science Center, 2725 Montlake Boulevard East, Seattle, WA 98112, USA. tom.good@noaa.gov

MORAL ENTANGLEMENTS—CONSERVING BIRDS IN BRITAIN AND GERMANY

Bargheer S. 2018. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, USA and London, UK. 326 pp. Softcover: ISBN 978-0-226-54382-6, £65.00. Paperback: 978-0-19-959724-6, € 30.39.

The title of this book came as a bit of a surprise to me: after having worked for bird conservation in the UK and in Germany for seven years each I could not remember once feeling morally entangled. However, it only made me more curious to find out what hides behind this title—and very well I did.

With his book, Stefan Bargheer, a German-born sociologist with university degrees from Germany and the UK, provides a detailed comparative account of the history of ornithology and

bird conservation in the UK and Germany. That alone is already an impressive achievement, but what makes the book unique is Bargheer's outside perspective as a sociologist trying to figure out the moral drivers behind bird conservation. He manages to convincingly slot the long history of the two biggest nature conservation organisations of the European continent neatly into an explanatory framework of social morality. If you are part of this history, which I am, it leaves you with a feeling of "this explains it all".

Clearly the book is primarily written for sociologists, and as such has become highly acclaimed in reviews from a social science background. Therefore, the introductory chapter outlining conflicting theories of morality presents a stumbling block for unwitting readers from the natural sciences and conservation world. But it is worth working through it, as it will all make sense in the end when social theory helps explain why we conservationists do what we do, where we find the energy to do so, and which strategies are proving especially successful to gain popular support. While the book is a spot-on historical account of the development of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in the UK and the German Society for Nature Conservation (NABU) in Germany, it is the sociological perspective that makes this book such an eye-opener for the bird conservationist.

The author is not a birdwatcher himself—probably his own loss, as he concedes in the acknowledgements, but certainly useful to maintain his position as an outside observer. Still, during his ten years of research for the book he admits having grown very fond of watching birdwatchers. On a side note, albeit not central to the underlying topic of the book, it is worth pointing out that there are next to no ornithological mistakes in the whole work, with the minor exception of a redshank perched on a German flag on the title cover of a NABU membership magazine—one of the few illustrations within the book—described as a songbird.

During his research, Bargheer dug through the archives of all major ornithological institutions of the two countries to reconstruct the beginnings of British and German ornithology. This history dates back to the middle of the 18th century when Carl von Linné was still alive. Modern events and discussions are largely based on interviews with 68 well-chosen key actors in both countries conducted between 2006 and 2012.

The underlying sociological finding of the study is that bird conservation in the UK has always been part of the world of play, while in Germany it has been part of the world of work. Stereotyped as this may sound, the author proves this underlying difference over and over again. Put simply, this means that bird science and conservation in the UK have always been motivated by the enjoyment of watching birds. In Germany on the other hand, fun was not allowed in the picture and bird watching was much less of a widespread pastime. The justification here was ‘economic ornithology’; that is, birds were important because of the economic benefits they provided by eating harmful pest insects. Birds were thus nurtured beyond natural levels through nest boxes and supplementary winter feeding. Summer feeding was discouraged, as the birds were then supposed to eat the harmful insects. This utilitarian approach earned bird protection early support in the German government, with state bird protection stations set up by administrations across the country in addition to the private bird conservation organisation that was the predecessor of today’s NABU. Until the end of WWII, this organisation had consistently larger membership numbers than the RSPB in the UK.

The downside to the German justification, the ‘economic ornithology,’ was that not all birds were eating insects—some were eating grain from the fields. Birds were judged and grouped as useful, the so-called ‘labor birds’, or harmful. The blue tit was seen as the archetypal representative of the first group, while the sparrow was the nemesis along with most birds of prey and all fish-eating birds. This distinction was still pursued by Germany’s

bird organisations until the 1960s, explaining why this notion still lingers in peoples’ minds today.

The economic argument for bird conservation started to fail when chemical pesticides took over from birds and, presumably, when ecological science discovered that birds alone cannot prevent major insect calamities. At this time, NABU’s predecessor had gone into decline, while the RSPB was flourishing with the rise of field ornithology.

Special attention of the moral sociologist was paid to the motivations that caused the transition from gun-based museum ornithology to bird photography, rarity-hunting, and the participation in systematic field ornithological data collection. As Bargheer states, this transition was not a revolution in moral values, but simply an adjustment made thanks to new technology becoming available. With cameras and binoculars available to all, the mounted museum specimen has been replaced by photos, published sight records, and data. Museum ornithologists were convinced they would preserve a rare species by shooting them and putting them into a glass case. Today, the live bird is the main prize, and very much the strongest motivation for bird conservation.

The RSPB turned this motivation to its advantage—membership figures grew exponentially from 1960, to over one million at the turn of the millennium. Contrastingly, NABU was slow to follow suit, while picking up the shambles of ‘economic ornithology’. With birds gaining a new value as ecological indicators since the DDT crisis and “The Silent Spring”, a radical re-direction of focus to a wider nature and environmental agenda helped NABU overcome its impending membership crisis. With a delay of twenty years, NABU now mirrors the membership rise of the RSPB, with 780,000 members and supporters by 2019. The most powerful recruitment topic is now the same as for the RSPB: the love and interest in birds that can easily be instilled in people.

The nest boxes and bird feeders so central to early German bird conservation are being used as bird watching opportunities by the RSPB for mass membership recruitment. Ironically, for a number of years they became almost rejected in Germany during NABU’s turn to a wider political conservation agenda. Only rather recently both organisations seem to have entered a similar path of development, using birds as the social motivation for engagement in nature conservation. This has been further facilitated by the formation of BirdLife International as the common umbrella organisation and EU bird conservation legislation as a common legal framework. The latter, however, is already in peril, with the UK currently leaving the EU. I would be keen to read a sequel to this book in 30 years’ time to find out whether this event will have had a significant effect on the further course of bird conservation in the two countries.

This book, published in April 2018 first and foremost as a sociological study, has yet to gain the attention amongst the conservation community it deserves. Every conservation practitioner or organisation manager will benefit from the outside perspective on their field of engagement. In Germany, the English language of the study is likely to hold it back. It would certainly be worth considering a translated version in German.

Lars Lachmann, NABU, Charitéstr. 3, 13465 Berlin, Germany. lars.lachmann@nabu.de

VAST EXPANSES: A HISTORY OF THE OCEANS

Rozwadowski, Helen M. 2018. Reaktion Books Ltd., London, UK. 268 pp., 65 illustrations. ISBN: 978-178023-99-2. \$25.

For me, and for most seabird biologists, the ocean is close to our hearts and never far from our thoughts. The birds we study depend on currents, winds, and cycles of marine productivity that provide a sense of the oceans that is decidedly different from the perspective one gains from standing on the shore. Similarly, seabird nesting islands are often places where few humans visit. Yet over time, island visitors have left their mark: tri pots for boiling whale blubber, shipwrecks, light houses, and wreckages of war all provide reminders of the historical connection of people to the oceans. Helen Rozwadowski begins her book *Vast Expanses: A History of the Oceans* with the argument that there is a “terrestrial bias in virtually all stories about the past”. As someone who has sought out human stories of the ocean, this opening made me pause and consider. The book that follows is a history of the global oceans, humanity’s connection with the ocean, and a short exploration of our scientific knowledge of the ocean.

The book is separated into seven chapters that usher the reader through the human history of the oceans. The first chapter, “A Long Sea Story”, starts four million years ago and progresses through time, discussing the importance of the coast for early hominids, and the ocean’s role in human dispersal. The second chapter, “The Imagined Ocean”, continues forward in history, touching on early cultural perception and use of the ocean. The third chapter, “Seas Connect”, details the voyages of the European age of exploration and trade beginning in the fifteenth century. This is followed by “Fathoming All the Ocean”, which describes the initial exploration of the depths of the ocean. The fifth chapter, “Industrial Ocean”, goes through whaling, fisheries, and the development of global shipping. The “Ocean Frontier” changes tone and provides a discussion of the wave of aquanauts, development of scuba, and popular interest in deep sea exploration. The final chapter, “Accessible Ocean,” discusses the integration of the ocean into popular culture but seems to stop somewhere in the 1960s. The chapter ends with a short description of ocean conservation. The book concludes with an Epilogue entitled “Ocean as Archive, Sea as History” that brings the reader into the modern day. The author speaks of our changing perceptions of the

ocean and expands her discussion of ocean environmental issues, including climate change and associated consequences like ocean acidification and sea level rise. She concludes with the sentiment that an intertwined history of humans and oceans is needed to change our perception of the ocean as a ‘vast and featureless wilderness’ and promote positive change for conservation. While I agree, her assessment feels outdated even two years after the book was published.

Throughout *Vast Expanses*, I paid special attention to when and where seabirds fit into the history of the oceans. I was somewhat disappointed, as they were typically mentioned as the combined resource of “marine mammals and seabirds”. The use of cormorants for fishing featured briefly in the second chapter and was accompanied by an early 1800s illustration of three women cormorant fishing. Generally, the links between humans and the sea that might be explored through seabirds were not featured. Time to write another history.

Overall, I found the book interesting and engaging and I was glad that I read it. It doesn’t quite have the swagger of a book meant for popular consumption, but each chapter kept me turning the pages. Throughout the book are 65 black and white plates that are a unique collection of images that range from a scientific plate illustration of a Steller’s Sea Cow, a 19th century aquarium, and a photo of Eugenie Clark, known as the ‘shark lady’ who pioneered research diving, resurfacing after a dive. This book would be useful as part of an undergraduate or graduate class on the oceans, as it provides an eclectic and broad historical background in a reasonably condensed 227 pages. The chapters could also be singled out to provide context for specific topics. If you are looking for a book that is an easy read and covers a great deal on global oceans, then I recommend picking up this book, as you are surely to stumble upon interesting facets of ocean history.

Rachael A. Orben, Oregon State University, Hatfield Marine Science Center, 2030 Marine Science Dr., Newport, OR 97365, USA. rachael.orben@oregonstate.edu