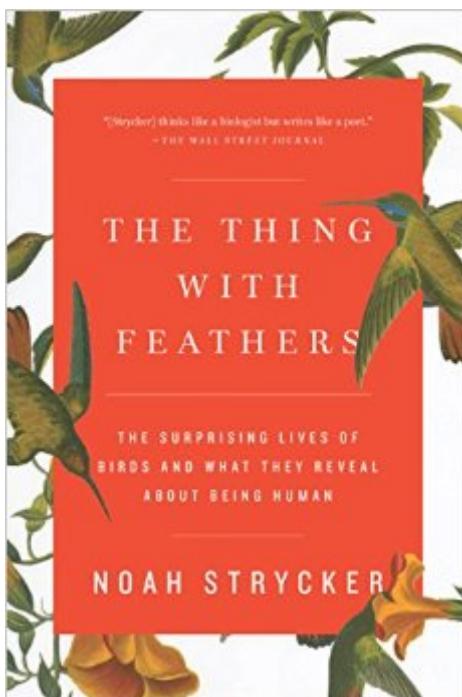


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The Thing With Feathers: The Surprising Lives Of Birds And What They Reveal About Being Human



Synopsis

An entertaining and profound look at the lives of birds, illuminating their surprising worldâ "and deep connection with humanity.â Birds are highly intelligent animals, yet their intelligence is dramatically different from our own and has been little understood. As we learn more about the secrets of bird life, we are unlocking fascinating insights into memory, relationships, game theory, and the nature of intelligence itself. The Thing with Feathers explores the astonishing homing abilities of pigeons, the good deeds of fairy-wrens, the influential flocking abilities of starlings, the deft artistry of bowerbirds, the extraordinary memories of nutcrackers, the lifelong loves of albatrosses, and other mysteriesâ "revealing why birds do what they do, and offering a glimpse into our own nature. Drawing deep from personal experience, cutting-edge science, and colorful history, Noah Strycker spins captivating stories about the birds in our midst and shares the startlingly intimate coexistence of birds and humans. With humor, style, and grace, he shows how our view of the world is often, and remarkably, through the experience of birds. Youâ ™ve never read a book about birds like this one.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This could have been titled Birds and Philosophy. Author Noah Strycker illustrates interesting behavior in the bird world, and compares it with human behavior. Sometimes it's unexpected behavior, other times it's downright startling. As we learn more about what makes other creatures tick, it gets harder to pin down what makes us different, what makes us human. The male bower

bird, for instance, spends ten months a year building, decorating, and perfecting an nest-like area that only serves to impress potential mates. Once the female bower bird has been sufficiently impressed by the male's building and decorating accomplishments, they mate, then she flies off to build her own nest and raise her chicks on her own. The male continues to work on his bower, and may mate with a dozen female bower birds per season. Since there's no apparent practical value in the bower itself, one wonders, is it art? Magpies can recognize themselves in a mirror, unlike other birds, and most mammals. Does this mean they have a sense of self, that they can recognize their reflections outside of themselves? Nutcrackers have amazing memories, recalling hundreds of locations where they've stored seeds for the winter. Having eliminated smell, luck, and some kind of marking system as methods of finding the seeds, researchers are convinced the nutcrackers memorize where the seeds are much the same way we would, by relying on landmarks and other patterns to remember. When birds and animals exhibit behavior that we typically think of as human, it's difficult not to anthropomorphize. Strycker keeps this to a minimum, but does occasionally make cutesy comments about the birds. And when it came to albatrosses, who mate for life, he was quite lyrical about romantic love.

I just finished reading Noah Strycker's new bird book "The Thing with Feathers." This is one of the best pieces of nature writing that I have read in years. It is a prize-winner. I didn't know quite what to expect of a book that was advertised as being about the interesting behaviors of birds but also about what birds could teach us about being human. That idea made me nervous and I imagined miscellaneous swamps that the book might have strayed into. I was wrong. I won't even try to describe how this concept is handled, I'll just say that it works not only well, but almost transparently, with an impression of effortless grace that most authors don't ever achieve. Loren Eiseley and Diane Ackerman come to mind (though Strycker is a much more cheerful writer). Some of the chapters are a little stronger than others, but the overall level is very high. I know from my own work as a writer and editor that this impression of extraordinary smoothness and naturalness in transitions in a work filled — even stuffed — with technical detail takes a lot of effort to achieve, and even a writer whose tale-telling habits are as good as Noah's must have fiddled and adjusted quite a bit, but the effort paid off. The detail about bird behavior is almost universally fascinating yet unobtrusive. I learned many new things from the book (including new truths about my own nose (I'll let you find out for yourselves), but never once felt that I was stumbling over too many ornithological factlets. In recent years I have been one of the principal proofreaders for Oregon State University Press and I have an eye for typos. — I saw exactly one in the whole book.

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