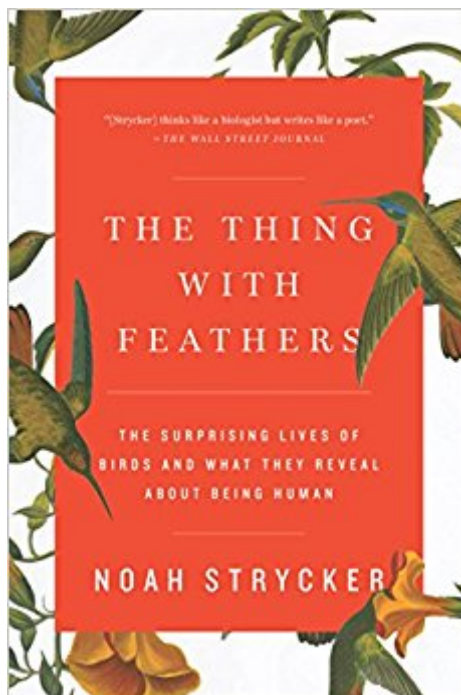




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The Thing With Feathers: The Surprising Lives Of Birds And What They Reveal About Being Human



Synopsis

An entertaining and profound look at the lives of birds, illuminating their surprising world—and deep connection with humanity. 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 mysteries—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. You’ve never read a book about birds like this one.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Birds are fascinating, and the more we humans study them, the more similarities we find between ourselves and our feathered neighbors. Strycker, editor of *Birding* magazine and author (*Among Penguins*, 2011), here combines the latest in ornithological science with snippets of history and his own vast experience in the field to hatch a thoroughly entertaining examination of

bird behavior. Some avian behaviors don't apply to humans – the almost magical homing abilities of pigeons, the incredible sense of smell of turkey vultures (as tested by the teenage author with the cooperation of a very dead deer and his extremely tolerant parents) – but many seemingly incredible bird actions have parallels in our own lives. Fairy wrens are cooperative breeders and show us one reason humans so often collaborate. The famous pecking order seen in domestic chickens certainly is evident in office politics, and magpies have often been seen holding impromptu funerals for their deceased flock mates. A sulphur-crested cockatoo named Snowball dances in synchrony to his favorite Backstreet Boys CD, leading to a discussion of the role of music for both birds and humans. Birds are equally alien and familiar, and in Strycker's absorbing survey, we find out how much fun it is simply to watch them.

--Nancy Bent --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for *The Thing with Feathers* "Mr. Strycker has the ability to write about the worlds of man and fowl without simplifying either.... He thinks like a biologist but writes like a poet, and one of the small pleasures of *The Thing With Feathers* is watching him distill empirical research into lyrical imagery.... Part the palm fronds behind his sentences, and you can almost see the British naturalist and broadcaster David Attenborough standing there in a pith helmet, smiling with amused approval at Mr. Strycker's off-center sensibility." *Wall Street Journal* "The Thing With Feathers turns a shrewd, comparative eye on a succession of bird families to explore what [Strycker] calls their 'human' characteristics. This is an engaging work which illuminates something profound about all life, including our own." *The Economist* "Lovely, provocative..." *Robert Krulwich, NPR* "Fascinating" *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* "One of the best bird books you'll read this decade. Guaranteed." -- *BirdWatching* "The Things With Feathers will encourage you to take a closer look at the natural world around you, and perhaps learn more not only about what you see but who you are." *Seattle Times* "[Strycker] combines the latest in ornithological science with snippets of history and his own vast experience in the field to hatch a thoroughly entertaining examination of bird behavior. In Strycker's absorbing survey, we find out how much fun it is simply to watch them." *Booklist*, **STARRED** "[Strycker's] prose is difficult to stop reading." *Publishers Weekly* "A delightful book with broad appeal." *Kirkus Reviews* "A dazzling variety of avian subjects, including connections between birds and humans." *Library Journal* "There's bird watching, then there is obsessing over

why nearly 2,500 different species do the things they do. That's Noah Strycker, and this lovely book is compelling to those that chart the different birds they see on walks, and the rest of us who just gaze longingly at them as they fly through the air.

— Flavorwire

“Noah Strycker explores the increasing likelihood that birds enjoy a vastly richer intellectual, emotional and even artistic life than we smug humans have ever suspected. Read this book.”

— Scott Weidensaul, author of *Living on the Wind* and *The First Frontier* “As the ‘owner’ of a dancing Green-cheeked Conure, as a life-long pigeon-lover, seabird researcher, and falcon enthusiast, I can tell you that not only is this book full of solid information but as a writer I am astonished at how loose and easy Noah Strycker has made the reading for us. This is an insightful and wonderfully companionable book. I can't wait to read more from Strycker; meanwhile we have this gem.”

— Carl Safina, author of *Song for the Blue Ocean* and *The View From Lazy Point*. “A thoughtful, engaging book, encompassing pigeon races, physics, vulture baiting, the Backstreet Boys, and a mathematical model applicable to both tennis rankings and chicken hierarchies—a work of dazzling range, nimbly written.”

— Brian Kimberling, author of *Snapper*

“I've read books about birds all of my life and this is the one I've been waiting for. Birds have a great deal to teach us. Strycker loves birds, understands their magic and mystery, and can extrapolate from their behavior wisdom for us all. At last we have a book worthy of this subject.”

— Mary Pipher, author of *The Green Boat*

Awesome book...amazing research, presented in a completely down-to-earth way, using touching scenarios, personal stories, and lots and lots of humor. A great gift for the bird lover in your life!

Being a bird nerd myself, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Balancing witty anecdotes and technical, peer-reviewed articles, Noah Strycker does an excellent job giving readers fun and surprising insights into the lives of our feathered friends. Going from stories about sterile poop from vultures to the love lives of albatross to red contact lenses and chickens, each chapter is equally interesting. I highly recommend this book to everyone! I have already suggested it to many friends and almost everyone in my family has read it now. We're huge fans and thank Noah for writing such a wonderful book!

This is the BEST!!! I've read a lot of books about birds, and even though most have been full of information, studiously presented, competently written...well, sometimes they are a bit dry, tedious,

meant to be picked up occasionally, but tough to sit down and read through. Dense? Maybe so. Strycker's book is absolutely wonderful, incredibly engaging from the first page to the last. Yes, every topic is VERY well researched, from how turkey vultures manage to locate dead yum yums (and it's not what you would think--a great sniffer, right?) to why snowy owls sometimes appear in the least likely locations--again, not what you would think...I tend to tear through a book that I am enjoying, but this experience was very different. I savored each chapter, set the book aside for a bit--and tried to stifle my appetite a bit to enjoy the next terrific piece. Strycker is an excellent writer, a creative thinker, a thorough researcher, a passionate lover of those things with feathers. --And his examination of birds goes beyond that to reflect on us, those things without feathers!

A wonderful book. I've given or recommended it to everyone I know who enjoys animals.

My favorite book of 2016

I bought the book because I often wonder why birds do what they do, and sometimes I even wonder what the heck they're actually doing. This book exceeded my hopes from the very first page. Strycker is not only an excellent and entertaining writer, but he is also obviously a curious and thoughtful researcher. Chapter after chapter I've learned something new - not just about birds but about humans, and the world we live in. It's so delightful that I keep reading excerpts out loud to whomever is in the room with me, and now there's a waiting line in my family; but since I can't put the book down, they won't have long to wait.

A very readable, often surprising and also sometimes moving story about the lives of birds, with many deeply thought-provoking parallels to our own lives and behaviour. You need not be a bird-watcher to enjoy the stories of pigeons, albatrosses or the Australian bowerbird, an unexpected artist of the wild. The old cliché is indeed true this time: if you read just one book about birds (or animals at large, for that matter) this year, this is the one.

I was looking for a good anecdotal addition to my growing interest in birds when I ran across the listing for this book and its quirky title. Had I stopped looking after reading the title I probably would have moved on, but it was the subtitle ("The Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human,") that gave me reason to explore further. How could knowing about birds - even a selected list of birds - teach us anything about our humanity? Within its pages, Noah Strycker

creates a compelling case for how living creatures are often like other living creatures; he shows us the mysteries that make us wonder; the baffling realizations that drive us to study birds at all. It transcends mere human psychology, exploring the abilities of homing pigeons, the precision of starling flocks, why white owls wander, the aggression of hummingbirds, penguin fear rhythm in parrots and true and undying love in albatrosses. It directly addresses the question: why are birds the way they are? It also defines the fascinating career of young Noah Strycker, a seasoned and widely experienced ornithologist (and associate editor of "Birding" magazine), whose avian curiosity drives the passion behind the quest to understand the brains of birds and how that relates to how we humans think, or, as Strycker writes, "This book may be about the bird world, but it's also about the human world." In its largest sense, Strycker analyses the physical, mental, and spiritual lives of birds from around the world through each of his more than a dozen selected breeds; more than that, it's how he sections his work. And for those looking for "an anecdotal addition" to their interest in birds, this might just be THE book you were looking for, and THE author to present it to you.

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