



Birding Under the Influence: Cycling Across America in Search of Birds and Recovery

Dorian Anderson

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A battle with drug addiction is supplanted by a bicycle-powered birding road trip in Dorian Anderson's gripping memoir *Birding Under the Influence*.

Anderson was an addict. Whether he was strung out on the drugs and alcohol he abused during his twenties or chasing down rare birds in his early thirties, he was also relentless. Questioning the life choices that led him to his neuroscience research fellowship, he decided to risk it all and attempt an American Birding Association Big Year, bicycling over 17,000 miles across the United States to spot and photograph over 600 types of birds. Though fatigue and extreme weather threatened his goals, the more difficult work was internal. Still, in time, he overcame his more harmful addictions by replacing them with this more healthy fixation.

In the course of his book, Anderson reflects on his drug-addled academic past and finds that his prior tracks led him astray from his true birding passion. He also shifts between discussing his own understandings of addiction and recovery and detailing his insights into birding and the birding community. His travel stories are sensory and filled with near misses and thrilling side-quests to spot unexpected rare species. When the story slows, it is to relay fascinating factoids about the rare birds Anderson sought—and the distinctive traits that often led him to a better understanding of his own life. Indeed, as Anderson experiences nature in all of its extremes, he reflects on how the earth can heal humans, even as people damage the earth.

Birding Under the Influence is a fresh memoir filled with insights into addiction, recovery, and birding—a story about how taking a closer look at the earth helped to recalibrate a man's struggling soul.

NICK GARDNER (November / December 2023)

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