



## Birds and Us: A 12,000-Year History from Cave Art to Conservation

**Tim Birkhead**

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*Birds and Us* is a fascinating look at the relationship between human beings and our avian relatives throughout history, written by ornithologist Tim Birkhead. The text follows the arc of the bird's flight through human art and culture, as well as our scientific, artistic, spiritual, and even culinary interest in birds.

The book goes back to the very beginning of the relationship between people and birds, examining cave paintings by the earliest humans and what they say about human attitudes and beliefs. It continues to follow the arc of the bird's flight through human art and culture. There are many examinations of esoteric historical events, as with Aristotle's theories about egg laying that he tried to prove through experiments with chickens. There is also a discussion of the infamous Dodo bird, and how the most popular images of the bird probably have little connection to the way it actually looked.

There are also meditations on birds as food, including discussions of decadent Roman tastes for exotic dishes like flamingo tongues. The delicacy is described in great, if unappetizing, detail. And the book features an engaging discussion of the history of bird watching as a pastime. Its development as a hobby is traced to publications in the nineteenth century that created a league of citizen ornithologists whose amateur observations added to the data collected by professional scientists. As an added bonus: Birkhead's personal adventures and scientific expeditions to far-flung locales are included, with details about people met and birds observed.

*Birds and Us* is an entertaining account of the journey that birds and humans have taken together throughout history. Tim Birkhead's book succeeds at being both an excellent history book and an informative nature guide.

MATT BENZING (July / August 2022)

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