



The Delightful Horror of Family Birding: Sharing Nature with the Next Generation

Eli J. Knapp

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Eli J. Knapp's *The Delightful Horror of Family Birding* trots the globe with humor, insight, and deep-seated appreciation for nature and bird-watching.

The essays jaunt through locales including Tanzania, Ecuador, and the Grand Canyon. They advocate for exploration of the natural world with charm, pausing to take in bluebirds, robins, and “meadowlarks alighting from a flowering field.” They deliver basic information about birds, as well as exploring the language of counting birds: a murmuration of starlings, a scold of blue jays, and a parliament of owls. It answers idle curiosities, too—how woodpeckers can physiologically withstand such vigorous jackhammering, and why birds that slam into glass and appear dead can revive and fly off.

As Knapp explains such topics to his students and his children in the text, his ultimate target audience is future generations. He stresses that birds inspire joy, a deeper understanding of the environment, and greater intimacy between people, capturing the unadulterated thrill of spotting a white ibis, the serendipity of seeing a blue-winged teal, and the rejuvenation of becoming more attuned to nature.

Though each can be read on its own, the essays gel together well. Their sky-gazing tone and unique perspectives are consistent, and they bring landscapes to life with lines like “An unassuming sparrow crouched down in the cattails.” The details are concrete and the descriptions on point, even sometimes self-reflective—as when Knapp, chasing an elusive Kilombero weaver, questions why he’s in a slowly sinking dugout. The book ponders big questions even when “answers were as hard to come by as shade.”

The Delightful Horror of Family Birding focuses on its subject with wit, erudition, and passion as vast as a great flock darkening the daytime sky.

JOSEPH S. PETE (November/December 2018)

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