

Their Fate Is Our Fate: How Birds Foretell Threats to Our Health and Our World

Peter Doherty

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Doherty emphasizes the delicate and interdependent nature of ecosystems; as the birds go, so do we.

An outwardly esoteric project from Nobel Prize-winning immunologist Peter Doherty, *Their Fate Is Our Fate* employs authorial charm and real-world anecdotes to present a compelling, engrossing case for paying careful attention to our avian neighbors.

Doherty notes that we're living through the sixth great wave of extinction, and he highlights a fresh and chilling cause: our own impact on the planet. These pages assure us that amateur birdwatchers can contribute to the work of a concerned scientific community by collecting data: birds "serve as sentinels, sampling the health of the air, seas, forests and grasslands that we share with them," and the more attentive we are, "the greater the likelihood of achieving feasible solutions that favor conservation."

The bulk of the project showcases work in Doherty's field through the lens of the bird population, reminding readers that it is there that many devastating pathogens first take root. Doherty covers flu pandemics, malaria, and other airborne illnesses and warns that as diseases spread in birds, so do they spread in humans. Even a slight rise in temperatures leads to an increase in mosquito populations, which in turn increases the preponderance of illnesses. Changes in local environments also do deadly damage, often moving diseases from species to species.

Doherty emphasizes the delicate and interdependent nature of ecosystems repeatedly, showing how we further ensure the destruction of bird populations. Small changes have domino effects: fewer raptors meant more carrion-eating dogs in India, wild dogs meant rabies, and the human toll reached tens of thousands.

Necessarily, these pages are often quite scientific, though Doherty manages to convey such information in an approachable manner. Anecdotes are delivered in amiable tones, if the prose also sometimes borders on quippy. Overall, Doherty is encouraging attentiveness and greater ecological responsibility, though it's clear that this will largely only delay the next pandemic.

The book warrants the scientific respect Doherty is entitled to but will also hold the attention of a more general readership. Both informative and charming, *Their Fate Is Our Fate* is an academically and historically grounded project with a sense of real urgency.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Winter 2014)

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