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The Living Bird: 100 Years of Listening to Nature – Evergreen Audubon

4-5 minutes



Many Evergreen Audubon members attended the airing of [The Sagebrush Sea](#). The photography of the Greater Sage-Grouse on their lek was truly stunning. The work of the same photographer, Gerrit Vyn, is the focus of [The Living Bird](#), a stunning volume published by [The Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#). Gerri is a photographer, cinematographer, and producer at the Lab. His photos have appeared in [National Geographic](#), [Audubon](#), [The New York Times](#), and many more. They are the center point of this splendid volume.

A Tufted Puffin graces the front cover. On the first page is a close view of a Northern Flicker, every feather distinct. As a fledgling photographer, I can hardly imagine being able to capture the

images that seem so natural. Photo after photo show neighborhood birds like White-breasted Nuthatch and Steller's Jays. Others seem almost impossible closeups, like the close-up of a Barrow's Goldeneye's golden eye.

More photos are stunning accomplishments, like the white Gyrfalcons sitting on cliffs on remote Arctic islands or hatchling Snowy Owls just emerging from their eggs. The close-ups of exceedingly rare and highly endangered Spoon-billed Sandpipers with chicks are really unbelievable.

Gerri offers three short vignettes, called "In the Field," providing us a sense of magic and the hard work required to get the pictures. He takes us to the village of Meinypilgyno, in Chukotka, Russia, to find The World's Most Imperiled Bird, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. It's early spring in July, with the tundra just greening up. He hikes up the moraine hills following the edges of snowdrifts searching for the sandpipers. Finding them has been hard work. The weather is challenging and the birds skittish. This evening he finds a pair, watching them forage, when a second male and then a third male approach. The first male stands tall, "with his head craned forward and his spooned lower mandible vibrating wildly with each trilled burst."

In Chukotka, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is readily found but Gerrit reminds us that we are driving this one-of-a-kind bird to extinction. Along its five-thousand mile migration, it relies on tidal mudflats on the Yellow Sea that are being destroyed, causing a population crash for the tiny and spectacular sandpiper.

Accompanying the stunning photographs in *The Living Bird* are several essays by world-renowned authors, including Barbara

Kingsolver, Scott Weidensaul, Jared Diamond, Lyanda Lynn Haupt, and Cornell Lab Director, John Fitzpatrick. Their essays are inspiring. I was especially drawn to Kingsolver's Foreward: "Bird-Watching With My Dad." She begins with a statement that means much to me, telling us "I have tried to look away from the birds. I know it's possible. People can manage their whole lives birdless...." She avoided birds as firmly as her father tried to convince her that they were important and interesting. She planned a life of bird disaffection but birds came to her rescue. He even fell in love with and married an ornithologist. She has long since forgiven her parents for trying to pull her into their cult. After her mother's death, she and her husband invited her father on a birding trip to Panama. Their most valued experience was the afternoon of the Rufous Motmot. After considerable searching, a Motmot dropped to the ground in front of them. Her Dad lowered his binoculars with an expression of rapture on his face. "Thanks for this," she said. "Thanks for birds." She tells us "everyone needs birds, at least a little."

There is much to enjoy in the pages of *The Living Bird*. The photographs dominate, but essays are stirring. Please enjoy them as much as I have.

[*The Living Bird*](#), The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Gerrit Vyn, Mountaineers Books, 2015