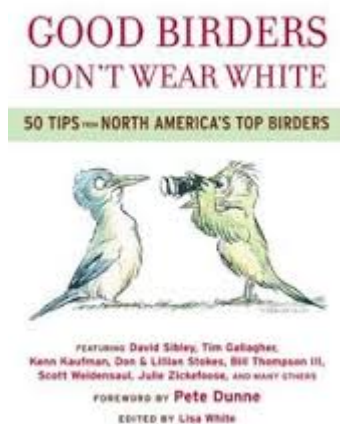


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Book Review: Good Birders Don't Wear White – Evergreen Audubon

5-6 minutes



Seemed like a good idea to move to something light this month. *Good Birders Don't Wear White: 50 Tips from North America's Top Birders* is a mostly serious collection of 50 short items by a group of well-known, fairly famous birders. These include Bill Thompson III, the editor of *The Birdwatcher's Digest*, Sheri Williamson, the hummingbird expert who is the keynote speaker at the June 2017 Colorado Field Ornithologists' Conference, Ted Floyd, the Boulder Birder who edits the American Birding Association (ABA) journal, and Noah Strycker, who recently completed an amazing list of more than 5,000 birds on his Big Year trek around the world. Pete Dunne, author of numerous books on birding including one of my favorites, *Prairie Spring*, provides the Foreword, in which he tells

us about several of the authors, most of whom he knows personally.

Each of the articles is only three to four pages long, which makes for quick reading. This is a book you can dip into any time you prefer. Connie Toop, freelance nature writer, explains how to create an ideal backyard habitat for birds. She explains how to select particular plants that your neighborhood birds clearly prefer. David Bird, professor of wildlife biology at McGill University, explains how to select the right food for the feeders. He explains how he carefully selects the best seed for the particular birds he wants to attract.

We were on a birding trip with Bill Thompson once, when he insisted on checking our binoculars and giving them a good cleaning. Apparently, he's a clean bins fanatic. He provides, in his article, step-by-step cleaning instructions. Sheri Williamson, the hummingbird expert, provides the article that names the book. She describes hunting for an Eared Quetzal in Arizona's Ramsey Canyon. She notices that the allusive quetzal keeps eyeing a birder dressed in a white shirt and cap. After asking the birder to shed the color, Sheri watches the now-calm quetzal return to its nest to feed its young. She argues that it's better to wear neutral colors that blend into the environment when birding.

Of course, Sheri's recommendation is immediately contradicted in the next article by Kenn Kaufman, perhaps best known for his account, *Kingbird Highway*. Kenn notes that for certain kinds of birds, particularly raptors, gulls, or pelagic birds, the color you wear makes no difference.

The small articles continue, providing great advice for becoming

a better birder. Jeff Gordon, ABA President, provides excellent information for the new birder by explaining that “The name of a bird will not tell you what it looks like.” Consider the Red-winged Blackbird. It doesn't have red wings. It only has a little red on the shoulders. The Purple Sandpiper that hung around Lake Dillon for two weeks this past winter isn't really purple. Other names are similarly misleading not only with regards to color. Connecticut Warblers don't nest in Connecticut and aren't easily found there, even though the first one named may have ended up in the hands of a local ornithologist.

One of my favorite stories is by Don and Lillian Stokes, of bird guide fame. They have developed six rules for seeing a Mangrove Cuckoo. Now, I was really attracted to this article because I've spent considerable time unsuccessfully looking for a Mangrove Cuckoo. That's why I appreciate their Rule 1: Never go looking for it. Trying to find a Mangrove Cuckoo never works. Rule 3 also applies to me: Never go out with someone who has been looking for the Mangrove Cuckoo for twenty years with no success. I think I definitely have to go birding, as they suggest, with a birder who has never even heard of a Mangrove Cuckoo. That might bring some good luck.

Our friend and birding leader, Victor Emanuel, explains how important it is to choose a good leader for a birding excursion. We've birded with leaders who had no people skills and spent more time finding birds for their personal life lists than for the group they were leading. And, we've had leaders who were eager to ensure that everyone saw the target bird and learned exactly what it looked like.

Our famous Colorado bird photographer, Bill Schmoker, weighs in on birding in bad weather. With the snowstorm in progress out my window as I write this, tomorrow might be a great day, or even Saturday with Chuck Aid (a great leader, by the way).

Anyone, expert birder or beginner, will find something informative and fun to read in this guide. Note that there is a new edition out recently. It's called *Good Birders **Still Don't Wear White***. I've haven't read it yet, but I'm looking forward to more good advice.

Houghton Mifflin, 2007.