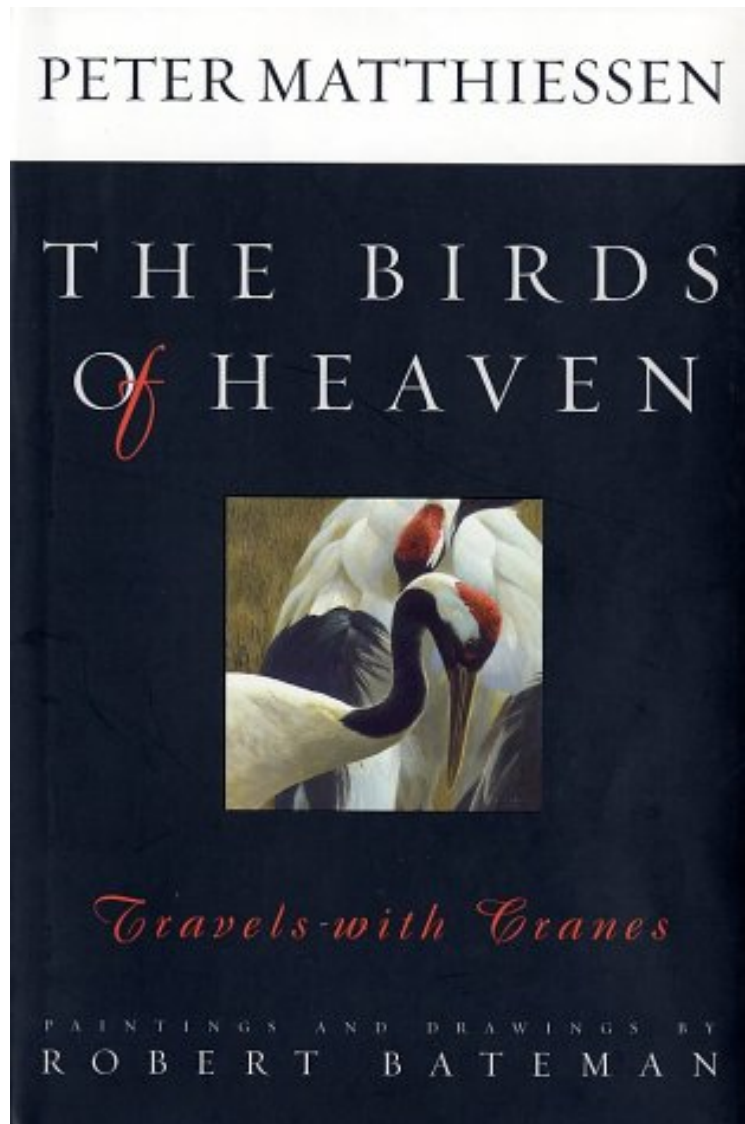


(Get free) The Birds of Heaven: Travels with Cranes

The Birds of Heaven: Travels with Cranes

Peter Matthiessen, Robert Bateman

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Peter Matthiessen, Robert Bateman : The Birds of Heaven: Travels with Cranes before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Birds of Heaven: Travels with Cranes:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful and spiritual book about a special bird.By Matthew KarnsPeter Matthiessen has long been one of my favorite authors, both for his brilliant fiction works as well as for his non-fiction. I was so saddened to read of his passing last week. His writing contains a quality that is intangible, something hard to put on a finger on but moving and spiritual in his description of natural landscape and the creatures that inhabit it. In this book Matthiessen travels the world in search of very special birds, cranes. He writes of the

absolute beauty of the species in stark contrast to the environmental degradation which threatens the various species habitat and very existence. Certain passages in the book lift you to another place and you feel like you are alongside Peter as he is observing these birds in their "dance" and daily struggles for continued existence. The reader also meets a wide variety of humankind in Peter's travels, from biologists and conservationists to indigenous peoples who view the crane as a sacred bird and worthy of admiration and protection. Overall a wonderfully written book by an amazing author.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Must read!

By Beach Atlantic I was driving in north Florida looking out over a mile of mud being transformed into a new expressway, to my left I saw four birds in tight formation, 12 feet above the ground, a shade of dusky blue, their necks and heads seeming to appear just below their bodies. Amazing. I figured out they were cranes, not herons, and now I have to read this book. An amazing experience, sue me if you don't like my review.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Grus, mostly

By H. Schneider Schiller's *Ibykus* said to 'his' cranes: We come from afar and beg for a hospitable roof. He travels 'with' cranes in the same sense as author Peter Matthiessen: we can look for them and we can meet them accidentally, but we can hardly travel with them, though the plight of *Homo* may not differ much from that of *Grus*, as far as the degradation of natural habitats is concerned. The cranes are in double trouble: as migratory birds, they are facing reduction in breeding grounds as well as in wintering grounds. In Schiller's poem, the itinerant musician *Ibykus* sees the cranes as his friends. If one has truly understood a crane - or a leaf or a cloud or a frog - one has understood everything. That's the kind of didactic statement that Peter Matthiessen likes to make. There is some truth in it, but as in all categorical declarations like this one, once you carry it too far, it becomes nonsense. (Which is the fate of all radicalisms, by the way.)

I bought this book recently for a variety of reasons. I read Matthiessen's marvelous *Snow Leopard* book about his Himalayan excursions, and apart from the fact that I forgot it completely, I remember that I absolutely loved it. So I thought: why not more of this kind? Also I thought: quite a few of my ama-zoo pals are bird-people, why not try and join the crowd? I am sure I could be a bird man too, if I didn't have the bad luck to live in a big city, since a long time. And then, the book is a travel book, and much of it is in and around China. Quite obligatory for me. Apart from that, the crane as Schiller's pet and as Lufthansa's logo animal is a natural subject for me. So where does that take me? To a beautiful book with lovely illustrations of cranes, by Robert Bateman. To a book of travels to the cranes in their natural habitats, worldwide. We go to the Amur region, where Russia and China have been uncomfortable neighbors. To Mongolia, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bhutan, the Yangtze basin, Hokkaido... The core message of the book is the plight of the crane: the destruction and degradation of its natural habitat by expanded human settlement, by drainage of wetlands, logging, mining, poisoning of rivers and lakes, dams, power lines, barbed wire fences.... The book wraps this message in a travelogue, which gives us political/historical backgrounds together with the social/economical reasons for the degradation. And it tells us about cranes' lives and about conservation efforts. But the book tries to do too many things, and in the end, only the illustrations are entirely satisfactory! The travels are partly somewhat flat and unoriginal. The analysis of habitat problems remains superficial. The political chapters about the problems in East Asia are unoriginal. And some pedantic observations on the edition: the maps are too small! They look great, but they would need a coffee table size book to be readable. And the irritating small errors of the writer: Mongolia fled into Soviet arms in 1911? (That's the kind of error that can creep in by careless editing; if he says that the fall of the monarchy in China in 1911 caused such instability in China over decades, that the Outer Mongolia region of China separated and became a practical protectorate of the Soviets later, as the nominally independent country Mongolia, then I withdraw my complaint.) China's Black Dragon Province Heilongjian is identical with 'Manchuria', the former Japanese puppet state? Only one third true. The last night of Chinese New Year is the last night of the previous year? Is he serious? Of course the last night before the Chinese New Year is the last night of the last year. Isn't that obvious? These little things mean little, but they reduce my enjoyment. And the small irritations of political valuation, like on the Chinese settlement of Mongolia and Manchuria: what is wrong with that? After all, both tribes subjugated China and ruled it for substantial times, in fact they integrated themselves into China. Or, similarly: trouble between Muslims and Hindus in India is caused by British colonialism? That is overstating the case, I think. Enough of the complaints. The strong side of the book, apart from the gorgeous paintings and drawings, is the adventure of crane sighting. Let's say 4 stars and a half. Which leads me to think: have I ever seen a crane? Or only herons and ibises and storks? Or only in zoos? I wish I knew. (How is the man's fiction, by the way?)

A leading naturalist and writer travels the globe in search of a prized-and vanishing-bird. Cranes are ubiquitous in the earliest legends of the world's peoples, where they often figure as harbingers of heaven and omens of longevity and good fortune. They are still held sacred in many places, and for good reason. Their large size and need for wilderness habitat makes them an "umbrella species" whose wellbeing assures that of other creatures and of the ecosystem at large. Moreover, the enormous spans of their migrations are a symbol of, and stimulus to, international efforts at conservation. In *The Birds of Heaven*, Peter Matthiessen has woven together journeys in search of the fifteen species of cranes in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and Australia. As he tracks them (and their declining numbers) in the company of scientists, conservationists, and regional people encountered along the way, he captures the dilemmas of a planet in ecological crisis, and the deeper loss to humankind if these beautiful and imposing creatures are allowed

to disappear. The book includes color plates by renowned wildlife artist Robert Bateman.

.com Acclaimed writer Peter Matthiessen, a self-professed "craniac," has been observing and studying all kinds of birds most of his life, but his pursuit of cranes is closer to a spiritual quest than a naturalist's exercise. These majestic, mythic, and notoriously shy birds, capable of soaring at heights of 20,000 feet, are often fond of remote and rugged places, so just locating the birds can be difficult enough, determining an accurate number often impossible. Some locales, such as the breeding grounds on the Platte River in Nebraska, boast flocks half a million strong--"by far the greatest crane assemblies on earth"; other areas support only a precious few. Matthiessen's search for 15 different species of cranes has taken him to hidden corners of Siberia, China, Mongolia, Tibet, Sudan, and Australia (where Atherton cranes were not even discovered until 1961). Despite his many years of adventure and wide travels, each crane sighting is still a thrill for him, and his curiosity and contagious enthusiasm bring the book alive. But *The Birds of Heaven* also serves as an ecological warning: "Perhaps more than any other living creatures, they evoke the retreating wilderness, the vanishing horizons of clean water, earth, and air upon which their species--and ours, too, though we learn it very late--must ultimately depend for survival." --Shawn Carkonen
From Publishers Weekly
rolific and gifted novelist and naturalist, National Book Award-winner Matthiessen (*The Snow Leopard*) provides literally a worldwide tableau in his quest for various subspecies of cranes. These large flying birds celebrated in myth and folklore are found everywhere from Siberia to Australia, sub-Saharan Africa to North America. The author moves through each of these diverse climes as he not only reminds readers of the awesome beauty of the natural world but also introduces them to fascinating bits of local history and legend. The title of the book derives from the lore of taiga-dwelling shamans, who believe these great birds possess the ability to traverse the three realms of heaven, earth and the underworld. In practical terms, that's not so far off: some species of cranes can fly as high as 20,000 feet, others migrate as far as 3,100 miles. In his wanderings, Matthiessen meets fellow travelers and "craniacs." Ornithologists, guides and hunters offer intriguing anecdotes about cranes and other creatures encountered during their adventures and misadventures in various wildernesses. Additionally, Matthiessen reaches into his store of historical and political knowledge about these remote places. He good-humoredly details, for example, the reluctant cooperation between Russian and Chinese environmental authorities as they try to study and ensure the survival of the various threatened crane subspecies that dwell along their faraway, beautiful, but politically tense borderlands. Eloquent and graceful, this lovely, moving narrative will inspire and delight readers with or without ornithological background or interests.
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From School Library Journal
Adult/High School--Cranes from all over the world are declining in numbers and are endangered species. America has only two varieties: the whooping and sandhill crane. Matthiessen makes a persuasive case for helping the birds survive human encroachment into their territories. His journalistic style is equally effective in portraying the mystical and mystifying qualities of these amazing creatures. Bateman's paintings and drawings emphasize the beauty and regal nature of cranes. The painting of the red-crowned cranes standing in the mist is a visual "call of the wild" and worth the price of the book.
Irene F. Moose, Fairfax County Public Library, VA
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