

## Foreword

“Birdwatching, huh? You mean you just *watch* them? What’s the point?”

Millions of people watch birds, some casually, some devoting staggering amounts of time and resources to an avocation that can border on obsession. And yet I’ll wager that nearly all birders have repeatedly faced some variant of the line of questioning above. No matter how essential an awareness and appreciation of birds may seem to those of us who already love them, lots of people—many of whom are in positions that involve making decisions with significant ecological impact—just don’t get it. Why should anyone care about birds?

One of the core virtues of this book is that the editors, Çağan Şekercioğlu, Daniel G. Wenny, and Christopher J. Whelan, along with their contributors, pursue the question of the value of birds along a broad front. Even as they seek, with authority and rigor, to explicate the many ways in which birds and their activities add real, measurable value to human economies, they never lose sight of the value birds have in their own right.

A single flock of snow geese might, over the year, provide various people with food, clothing, recreation, an aesthetic thrill, and a deep, even spiritual sense of connection to the passing of seasons and time. That same flock might also provide a level of ecosystem disservice, perhaps overgrazing certain habitat areas. But apart from all these human-assigned, instrumental values, there is the intrinsic value of the geese themselves: sentient, social beings amazingly adapted to some truly challenging conditions. This book is large enough in scope and wide enough in outlook to embrace all these things.

If we are to successfully advocate for the conservation of the birds and the habitats that have done so much to sustain our own lives, we must

adopt just such an outlook because we need as many arrows in our quivers as we can get. In one situation, the simple aesthetic beauty of birds and bird song may be persuasive; in others, dollars and cents may be the only language spoken. Most often, though, it will take a combination of approaches to carry the day and build consensus around bird conservation.

*Why Birds Matter* is a most welcome example of how scientific ornithology undergirds and enriches the pleasure we get from even informal, recreational birdwatching. Birders who read it will come away with a new understanding and appreciation of just what a contribution birds make to our world and to our lives. They'll also be better able to answer the persistent queries of skeptics, likely winning converts to bird appreciation and conservation in the process. And that matters a great deal indeed.

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