



Bright Wings: An Illustrated Anthology of Poems About Birds

Billy Collins (Editor) , David Allen Sibley (Illustrator)

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In this beautiful collection of poems and paintings, Billy Collins, former U.S. poet laureate, joins with David Allen Sibley, America's foremost bird illustrator, to celebrate the winged creatures that have inspired so many poets to sing for centuries. From Catullus and Chaucer to Robert Browning and James Wright, poets have long treated birds as powerful metaphors for beauty, escape, transcendence, and divine expression.

Here, in this substantial anthology, more than one hundred contemporary and classic poems are paired with close to sixty original, ornithologically precise illustrations. Part poetry collection, part field guide, part art book, *Bright Wings* presents verbal and visual interpretations of the natural world and reminds us of our intimate connection to the "bright wings" around us. Each in their own way, these poems and pictures honor the enchanting creatures that have been, and continue to be, longtime collaborators with the poet's and painter's art.

Poet and bird pairings include: Wallace Stevens and the Blackbird; Emily Dickinson and the Robin; Marianne Moore and the Frigate Pelican; Thomas Hardy and the Goldfinch; Sylvia Plath and the Pheasant; John Updike and the Seagull; Walt Whitman and the Eagle; Billy Collins and the Sparrow.

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From Reader Review Bright Wings: An Illustrated Anthology of Poems About Birds for online ebook

Allison says

This is a beautiful little book full of poems and lovely illustrations of birds. I'm already smitten.

Meghan Pinson says

Turns out my interest in birds is entirely separate from my interest in poems, but there was this, which made it worthwhile:

Wild Geese
by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting--
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Lindsay says

Mostly for bird fans, although there a few poems that are gems whether you have a passion for birds or not.

Sylvester says

I like the concept of this anthology. For wild bird lovers its a treat. The combination of bird art and poems is well done. Poetry deserves to be presented thoughtfully, and I think the editor succeeded in this collection. I recommend it.

A sample of one of the more well-known poems:

Sandpiper

The roaring alongside he takes for granted,
and that every so often the world is bound to shake.
He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward,
in a state of controlled panic, a student of Blake.

The beach hisses like fat. On his left, a sheet
of interrupting water comes and goes
and glazes over his dark and brittle feet.
He runs, he runs straight through it, watching his toes.

- Watching, rather, the spaces of sand between them
where (no detail too small) the Atlantic drains
rapidly backwards and downwards. As he runs,
he stares at the dragging grains.

The world is a mist. And then the world is
minute and vast and clear. The tide
is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
His beak is focussed; he is preoccupied,

looking for something, something, something.
Poor bird, he is obsessed!
The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray
mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst.

Elizabeth Bishop

Catherine says

This is a book for bird lovers who don't have the means, patience, or keen eyesight to wait for hours in the wild for a quick glimpse of some little feathered beauty. You can open Bright Wings anywhere and learn some fascinating snippet of info under the gorgeous David Sibley illustration on the left side page. For instance, the female Northern Cardinal is one of the few NA female songbirds who sings; the Great Horned Owl is the only animal that regularly eats skunks; the female Belted Kingfisher is brighter than the male; the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher may line its nest with cigarette butts, while the Great Crested Flycatcher prefers snakeskin--it just goes on and on! Then you can savor a wonderful poem about that bird on the right page--selected by Billy Collins. I love this book!

Diane says

a simply charming collection of poetry that looks like a field guide. A big tweet for the poet biologist, and

Collins and Sibley know their respective fields.

Eloise Klein Healy says

Probably will be reading this for awhile. I'm a birder and I am usually careful with reading poems about birds.

Fueledbychocolate says

I'm torn. The artwork is beautiful and amazing 5 stars - worth owning the book just for that. Poetry: 2-3 stars. Aside from a small handful of really good poems the majority didn't touch, excite nor inspire me.

Louise Chambers says

Had to get this through Interlibrary Loan. I've suggested to Denver Public Library to purchase.

I am thinking of buying it for my poetry collection. The book is big enough to show the illustrations well, and the poetry is beyond conventional, with a good selection of older and modern poetry on the experience of seeing birds, of experiencing birds in a most personal way.

In many of the poems, if the reader is a birder, they will be able to tell that the poet is an avid one, too.

Krenner1 says

For bird lovers...gorgeous illustrations matched with gorgeous poetry. What's not to love? Thanks, Bailey!

Therese Broderick says

A small but gorgeous treasury: 57 full-color illustrations by the celebrated bird painter David Allen Sibley, and poems written by 98 international authors (but not composed in collaboration with the artist), and interesting tidbits of ornithology presented as captions to the pictures. Almost all of the poetry is tasteful and conservative in both style and content, with a few archaic phrases to please the nostalgic reader. Poems about bird-watchers themselves open and close this glossy anthology which would make a lovely -- and reasonably priced -- holiday gift.

Pam says

What a treat! Paintings of birds with informative text paired with diverse poems. Learning, reviewing, and looking parallels interacting with words. About birds, maybe my favorite creatures. Only wish the roadrunner had made the cut for this TX girl, now I need to find a poem to satisfy my craving. Thanks Billy Collins!

Ray Zimmerman says

This book could not help but be a lovely addition to my personal library, with editing by a former Poet Laureate of the United States and Illustrations by the author of one of America's most popular birding guides. Collins has worked hard to popularize poetry, especially during his two-year tenure as Poet Laureate. He is also a birdwatcher, judging from his poem "Osprey" (published elsewhere).

The order of poems and illustrations follows the order in Sibley's guide, beginning with Common Loon, and ending with three poems about the American Goldfinch. The collection does not include every bird seen in North America, but each illustration has a brief descriptive paragraph by Sibley, as well as one or more poems. The illustrations show primarily male birds in breeding plumage, though the kingfisher has the bright red belly band of a female bird.

I would not attempt to use the book as a field guide, but it is a thoroughly enjoyable read, potentially introducing novices to birds and new readers to poetry.

Patrice says

The Sibley illustrations are gorgeous! The poems unique! I especially love "Swan and Shadow." This collection is a gem.

Gemma Innes says

This book was a bit of a difficult one for me. I have been trying to read more poetry and have been finding it very hit or miss. This book was more of a success than my previous attempt as I picked an anthology of many different poets with a common theme that I have some interest in, birds. I found that I understood and so could appreciate some poets and not others. There were some I liked and some I didn't. Hopefully I will go into a more in depth review on my blog. Overall I found the book to be enjoyable the different range of styles and skill levels was engaging. It may have been nice to have just a quick passage on each poet, their style and time period.

The second major aspect of the book, the ornithological painting were breathtaking. I loved each one and learnt the names of many new birds.
