

OTHER

Bird Lady — A Lifelong Love Affair with Birds

By Elizabeth Le Geyt. 2014. Friesen Press Inc., Suite 300 – 852, Fort Street, Victoria, BC, Canada, V8W 1H8. 184 pages, 18.57 CAD, Paper.

Elizabeth Le Geyt is an Ottawa icon. Long before the internet and emails she wrote a column about birds in the *Ottawa Citizen's* which lasted for 39 years. Using information phoned in by local bird watchers she reported what birds were where and what they were doing. This enabled her readers to make informed decisions on where to go on their own field trips. This gained her an extensive and loyal local following. Unfortunately the column included some bizarre gaffs that irritated the truly passionate birders. Names would get mixed up, for example Broad-shouldered Hawk. Did this mean a Broad-winged Hawk or a Red-shouldered Hawk? Sometimes it would be the numbers that were corrupted. Was there one Snow Bunting with a flock of 250 Snowy Owls or was it really the other way round? So I was not surprised when I read of her joy as a teenager at watching a heronry of Great Blue Herons near her home at Bothwell. The problem is Bothwell is near Glasgow, Scotland, and there is only one record of this North American species in the UK (St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, 7 December 2007). Clearly the author means the Grey Heron (13,000 nests and about 63,000 birds according to the RSPB). The black-and-white photo of a heron's nest that follows, is labelled as Great Blue and I think this is correct. You cannot see the colour of the thighs, but they look grubby, not white.

But this is not a time to pick at the ornithological details in this book. It is the tale of one woman's passion for nature and, in particular, birds. The author

recounts her youth in Great Britain and her joy at discovering its many birds. You can follow her journey to adulthood and then her marriage and resultant family. Her husband a Royal Navy officer is posted to Canada; first Halifax then Ottawa. This gives Le Geyt a new group of birds to learn and enjoy.

She is asked to take over the bird column in the *Ottawa Citizen*. This brings her a whole new coterie of contacts and friends. Her caring nature leads people to bring her orphaned and wounded wildlife. Eventually she forms a liaison with the Wild Bird Care Centre where injured animals are treated and rehabilitated and released back into a typical habitat. It is questionable whether a hand-reared creature placed in the wild would fare well. If the habitat is ideal it likely has a resident occupier, who will drive any newcomer away. Eventually it will be driven to poor habitat where it will be vulnerable to starvation and predation. However the process of caring for the distressed and helpless creatures has a powerful message to the untutored public. Le Geyt and her friends have raised the awareness of the plight of wildlife and the environment and much of this has been achieved through their rescue efforts.

The author gives a concise portrayal of the important wildlife areas of the Ottawa area. She describes her adventures with Jacko, an African Grey Parrot, Joey the Rock Pigeon; and Rattles the kingfisher. She also reports on trips she took to South Africa, Mexico, Costa Rica, Trinidad, Arizona and her return to Great Britain.

Elizabeth Le Geyt is a good writer who uses a light, breezy style to bring the reader into her passion. Her tales are told with warmth and humour. I really enjoyed learning of her childhood and comparing it to my own. The wonder she shows at seeing her first Canadian birds is something else I can share. When she describes the exploits of Jacko, Joey and Rattles her writing reflects her own warm and kindly nature. Her journeys to other countries again reminds me of my own travels.

I think all those readers who followed Le Geyt's column will delight in this book. Any one who loves nature will enjoy this light-hearted book. The reader will feel relaxed and uplifted with every chapter, so perhaps even non-naturalists should buy a copy – it will improve their environmental awareness. This delightful book is a remarkable achievement for a woman who is over 100 years old.

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