



# To See Every Bird on Earth: A Father, a Son, and a Lifelong Obsession

By Dan Koeppel

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**What drives a man to travel to sixty countries and spend a fortune to count birds? And what if that man is your father?**

Richard Koeppel's obsession began at age twelve, in Queens, New York, when he first spotted a Brown Thrasher, and jotted the sighting in a notebook. Several decades, one failed marriage, and two sons later, he set out to see every bird on earth, becoming a member of a subculture of competitive bird watchers worldwide all pursuing the same goal. Over twenty-five years, he collected over seven thousand species, becoming one of about ten people ever to do so.

*To See Every Bird on Earth* explores the thrill of this chase, a crusade at the expense of all else—for the sake of making a check in a notebook. A riveting glimpse into a fascinating subculture, the book traces the love, loss, and reconnection between a father and son, and explains why birds are so critical to the human search for our place in the world.

“Marvelous. I loved just about everything about this book.”—Simon Winchester, author of *The Professor and the Madman*

“A lovingly told story . . . helps you understand what moves humans to seek escape in seemingly strange other worlds.”—Stefan Fatsis, author of *Word Freak*

“Everyone has his or her addiction, and birdwatching is the drug of choice for the father of author Dan Koeppel, who writes affectionately but honestly about his father’s obsession.”—*Audubon Magazine* (editor’s choice)

“As a glimpse into human behavior and family relationships, *To See Every Bird on Earth* is a rarity: a book about birding that nonbirders will find just as rewarding.”—*Chicago Tribune*

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

For some people, bird watching is a compulsion that can become more important than friends, family or career. Richard Koeppel is one of those obsessive birders, and in this candid book, his son shares his story, painting his father as a tragic figure who passionately wanted to become an ornithologist but became the doctor his parents wanted him to be instead. Not surprisingly, Richard's medical career never satisfied him, and he gave it up to become a "Big Lister," one of a group of highly competitive birders who travel the world making lists of their sightings. Over the years he spotted more than 7,000 different species, a number achieved by fewer than a dozen others. Nature writer Koeppel fleshes out his account of Richard's 50-year bird-watching odyssey with facts about this ritualized, expensive sport, including its history, the rules and technicalities of listing, the people and organizations devoted to making the lists, and questions of taxonomy. His hope, he writes, was to forge a closer relationship with his father and understand the "nearly unquenchable" drive that ruled Richard's life, ruined his marriage and made it impossible for him to be close to his children. But in the end, despite trekking alongside his father on birding expeditions, he still can't quite understand it. His book, then, is more poignant than revelatory. *Agent, Laurie Liss. (June)*

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#### From Booklist

Birding has become one of the most popular outdoor pursuits. What do you get when you combine birding with competition, obsession, and the sheer love of counting? You get a Big Lister, a person who aspires to see every bird species on Earth. The author's father is among the 12 or so birders to have seen 7,000 birds or more, and this is his story. When 11-year old Richard spotted a brown thrasher in a Queens woodland, and then found out how to identify birds from a local bird club, he promptly started a list. Battling with his parents (who drove him into the practice of medicine but were unable to squelch the growing obsession with birds), Richard tried and failed at marriage (though produced the book's author) and ultimately traveled the world in the elusive desire of seeing every species. The psychology of Big Listing--birds becoming a means to an end--is sensitively portrayed. The subtext of listing's effect on the relationship of the author and his father provides immediacy. *Nancy Bent*

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