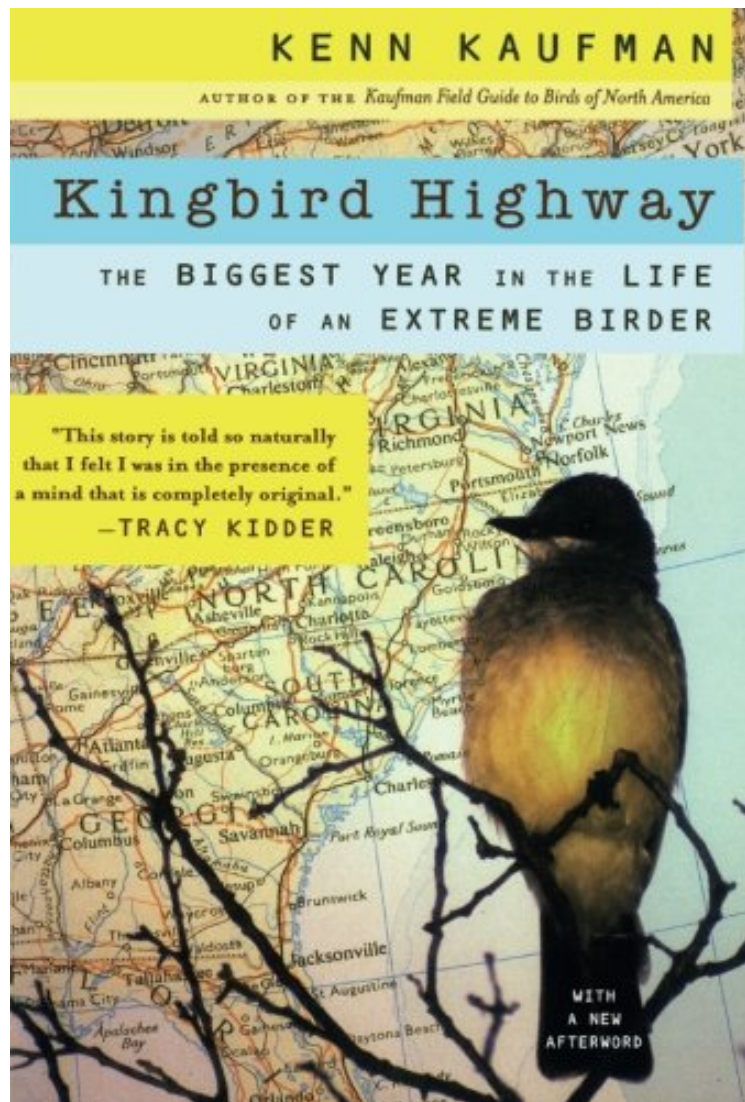


[E-BOOK] Kingbird Highway: The Biggest Year in the Life of an Extreme Birder

Kingbird Highway: The Biggest Year in the Life of an Extreme Birder

Kenn Kaufman

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#339250 in Books Houghton Mifflin 2006-04-11 2006-04-11 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.25 x .79 x 5.501, .70 #File Name: 0618709401336 pages Author: Ken Kaufman ISBN: 0618709401 | File size: 37.Mb

Kenn Kaufman : Kingbird Highway: The Biggest Year in the Life of an Extreme Birder before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Kingbird Highway: The Biggest Year in the Life of an Extreme Birder:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Good story whether you're a birder or not By Marc Baldwin I wasn't sure how I would like this book because I'm a casual birder and not even in the same galaxy as a birding legend like

Kenn Kaufman. But based on some of the reviews that I had read it sounded like it was as much about life as it was about birds. Kaufman had me hooked from the beginning. A 16-year-old drops out of school to hitch hike around the country and look at birds? With a premise like that, I figured there had to be some adventure worth reading about. It is true that most of the book is based on his actual pursuit of seeing birds, not on the process of thumbing it from coast to coast, but the side stories are entertaining. As a birder, one of the most enjoyable parts of the book for me was looking at all the birds as he mentions them in the book. I have a bird guide app on my phone and I would pause often to look at pics of the birds and listen to their calls. I felt a little bit like I was part of the adventure. My favorite part of the book was reading about his journey from boyhood fascination, to chasing a big year, and then back to seeking enjoyment from birding rather than focusing on listing. Indeed, birding is not unlike any other endeavor in that once you start spending more and more time doing it there is a lot of pressure to "get better" or "get serious" about it. I very much appreciated Kaufman's conclusion that listing can suck the fun and enjoyment out of observing birds, as much as a stopwatch and a heart rate monitor can suck the fun out of cycling. If love to watch birds, then you're a birder! You don't have to have expensive binoculars, take vacations to Arizona during migration, or keep a list of what birds you've seen. The important thing is to enjoy what you're doing. As a guy who considers himself a terrible birder but loves to be outside watching birds, I felt like Kaufman wrote this book to encourage me - and it worked. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Birder Lives His Dream By Candace in Phoenix This book was great. I thought Phoebe Snetsinger was obsessed but she was able to do her birding (albeit hers was throughout the world and Kenn's was in North America) with plenty of money to back her travels. Kenn was only 16 when he hit the road to pursue his passion, with his parents' blessings. At the age of 19, when he embarked on his winning Big Year, he was able to spend only about \$1,000 for the whole 12 months of crisscrossing the continent for 69,000 miles, much of it hitchhiking, and rolling out his sleeping bag any place he could find. Now one of the world's top bird experts and bird artists, it paid off for him and he has given up listing for the joys of truly learning about birds. As a birder myself on a far less grand scale, I loved hearing about the birds but I was mostly fascinated by how he lived during his early years. I'm about the same age as Kenn so I understand what the country was like when he was following his dream and I wish I had been into birding back then, too, at such an exciting time. This book makes me want to read more birder autobiographies to explore the obsessiveness they (we) all seem to share. I'd rather be birding but it's hot in Phoenix right now so I'll read about birding for awhile. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Ornithological pilgrimage By Karl Janssen Im what you might call a casual birder. I dont get out as much as Id like to, and Im certainly not in Kenn Kaufmans league. When I do go birding, I always carry his Kaufman Focus Guide to the Birds of North America in my back pocket. Im not sure why its taken me so long to read his 1997 book Kingbird Highway, but I can finally scratch this birding memoir off my life list. When Kaufman was 16 years old, he dropped out of high school to pursue his love of ornithology. With his parents permission, he left his home in Wichita, Kansas to travel around the country viewing birds in the wild. In this memoir, Kaufman details his 1973 attempt at a Big Year that is, to be the birder who spots the most species in North America in a given calendar year. At this period in history, birding was gaining popularity and just starting to grow into a national pastime. In this book, Kaufman is to birding what Forrest Gump is to jogging. Through his adventures, we see the youth of the American Birding Association and the nascent beginnings of the extensive birding communications network that exists today. Too many nature writers err too far on the side of either poetry or science. Thankfully, Kaufman commits neither of these sins; his writing on birds maintains a delicate balance between the two. The book really isnt so much nature writing, however, as it is travel writing. In his Big Year quest, Kaufman estimates he hitchhiked about 69,000 miles around North America while living on less than a dollar a day. The chronicle of his travels is like a rose-colored version of John Krakauers Into the Wild where everything goes right. Birds or no birds, anyone whos ever felt the tug of wanderlust cant help but envy Kaufman his adventure. The best passages of the book are those in which he contemplates life on the road. He doesnt sugar-coat the dangers or the downers, but he more than adequately and eloquently relates the exhilarating liberation of voluntary homelessness. Unlike so many of us caught up in the hamster wheel of life, he followed his dream and lived to tell about it. As for the birding stories, they engage the reader with mixed success. A few of his quests really impart the excitement of hunting for elusive quarry, like his journey down to Mexico to spot the Eared Trogon, or the general awesome grandeur of his trip to Alaska. After a while, however, the bird trips start to get a little monotonous. Kaufman drops a lot of names of fellow birders in his stories, yet he doesnt do much to distinguish one from another, so often the less solitary portions of his narrative read like pages of acknowledgements. The only readers likely to recognize these names are those who diligently peruse the field notes in each issue of North American Birds. Towards the end of the book, Kaufman begins to grow tired of his journey and becomes disillusioned with the practice of obsessive listing. The reader comes to share these mixed feelings, yet it seems much of the book is tailored toward that narrow audience of obsessive listers. The more you are involved in the birding scene the ABA, the Audubon Society, Christmas bird counts, rare bird alerts, listing, etc. the more you will enjoy the book. If, like me, youre just a casual nature lover who enjoys birding on your own, this book might be a bit much for you.

Now revered as one of North America's top birders, Kenn Kaufman hit the road at age sixteen and spent a year

crisscrossing the country to see as many birds as he could, in a birding competition known as a "big year." In what has become a classic among birders, this memoir chronicles the subculture of birding in the 1970s and a teenager's search for his place in the world. In a new afterword, Kaufman looks at the evolution of bird-listing since his own big year.

.com As ornithologist Kenn Kaufman recounts in his lively memoir *Kingbird Highway*, he's managed to do what other birders only dream of doing: take a year and chase winged creatures from one end of the country to another. The year in question was 1973, when Kaufman was 19 years old, and a few dollars and an outstretched thumb could go a long way. Armed with binoculars, notebook, and the blessing of birder patron saint Roger Tory Peterson, Kaufman set out to capture the record for most species spotted in a single year. He came close, closing with 666 species sighted from Alaska to Florida and back again. More important, he racked up a lifetime's worth of adventures on the road. These stories form the heart of his book, a narrative in which spotted redshanks, white-eared hummingbirds, marbled murrelets, and black-capped gnatcatchers are among the chief supporting players. From *Booklist* Kaufman set out on his first solo birding trip when he was 16 years old, on a Greyhound bus, starting in Wichita, Kansas, and ending up in a California jail, for it was illegal for minors to be in that state without adult supervision. So began his quest to set a record: spotting the most North American bird species in a one-year period. Kaufman did just that in 1973, sighting what was then a record 229 species on a grueling hitchhiking trip that took him from Puget Sound to the Florida Keys and the Dry Tortugas in the Gulf of Mexico. Other birding trips followed, from North Dakota to Alaska, from Alaska to Maine, from Maine to Mazatlan in Mexico, and from Arizona to New Jersey. On those arduous trips, too, the author hitchhiked, stopping to work at odd jobs to earn a few dollars. His book is a fascinating memoir of an obsession with birds. George Cohen From *Kirkus* sYou may not have found your loins quivering at the thought of a rose-throated becard, but Kaufman (*Lives of North American Birds*, not reviewed) has, and here he sings sweetly about the birder's ineffable fascination with all things feathered. By the age of 16, Kaufman knew what he wanted from life: to look at birds. So he dropped out of school--with the blessings of his admirably tolerant parents--and hit the road in search of birds. With very little money, he needed ingenuity to survive. He discovered, for instance, that a box of Little Friskies cat food could sustain him for a week. He gradually encountered a subculture of birding aficionados and joined their ranks. In 1973, when he turned 19, he decided to embark on a so-called Big Year: to count as many species as he could manage in a year's time. The book is largely taken up with that quest. There are, of course, plenty of birds here, from the everyday to the extremely rare, but Kaufman also provides--in a winning, plain-spoken prose style--a Baedeker that covers the fine art of hitchhiking, crackling landscapes, and sharp profiles of other birders (as with any subculture, the personalities ranged from the repulsive to the sublime). The listing begins to pale by the end of the year: "Views of birds are measured in milliseconds, in which bird songs are classified instantly, and then ignored, in which no precious moment of daylight could be wasted on aesthetics." Yet one can only marvel at how determined he was (he eventually counted 666 species) and at the purity of his enterprise, and join him in regretting that the compilation of lists has shifted "away from knowledge and planning and experience, toward contacts and hotlines and money." For Kaufman, the pleasure now lies not in lists but in simply watching attentively. He makes us understand the joys of both in this frank, passionate book. (maps and drawings, not seen) -- Copyright 1997, *Kirkus Associates, LP*. All rights reserved.