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Winging It

A Beginner's Guide To Birds Of The Southwest

By Catherine Coulter, et al.

Jennifer Owings Dewey, Illustrator

Hardcover: 127pp; \$19.95

University of New Mexico Press, October 2004

ISBN: 0826330681

Frawnk! Knowing how to properly greet a great blue heron is only one of the attractions of *Winging It*, a kid-friendly beginner's book that will delight bird lovers of all ages. Though technically a guide to avian life of the southwest, *Winging It* includes many species that will be familiar to bird watchers from other regions of the U.S. as well. (I'm from Ohio and found that most of the birds featured here—certainly more than enough to justify the price of the book—are also common in my neck of the woods.) The illustrations by Jennifer Owings Dewey (author of *Clem, the Story of a Raven* and *Paisano the Roadrunner*; about birds she raised in her own home) are not only painstakingly accurate, but also wholly endearing, and manage to capture the essence of creatures whose predominant characteristic is swift movement away through light and leaves. The design of the book is pleasing and comprehensive, and includes striking, clear photographs; engaging drawings of birds, nests, eggs, and tracks; bird-related quotations; amusing stories of child-bird backyard encounters; and even a mini-glossary at each chapter's end. (The term *cryptic posture*, for example, refers to the way an owl "hides" during the day, "eyes closed, body feathers flattened down and its tufts raised," so that it blends in with the tree trunk.) Also included are a number of bird poems, like this one by Victor Hugo: "Be like the bird, who / halting in his flight / On limb too slight / Feels it give way beneath him, / Yet sings, / Knowing he hath wings." *Winging It* is a font of fascinating facts: the raven, "probably the most intelligent of all birds," uses tools, solves problems, and can count to seven; nuthatches (as many as a hundred at a time) stack themselves in hollow trees to keep warm, and can also turn to hide the nest hole with the dark side of their bodies; and the mockingbird has been heard to imitate "a chirping cricket, a barking dog," and even "the back-up signal of a truck." For the definitive hummingbird nectar recipe (no red dye, please) and the surprising answer to whether you should return that fallen baby bird to its nest, you'll need to get your own copy of this wonderful book that confirms American ornithologist Frank Chapman's words: "Everyone is born with a bird in his heart."

— Ann Stapleton