

## IMMIGRANT GONE TO HEAVEN: DUTCH POLDER TO CANADA'S FRONTIER

VERMEER, K. 2021. Victoria, Canada: Friesen Press. 246 pp., numerous photos. Hardcover: ISBN 978-1-5255-6436-9, CA\$49. Paperback: ISBN 978-1-5255-6437-6, CA\$36. eBook: ISBN 978-1-5255-6438-3, CA\$10.

Most seabird biologists lead interesting lives, and many work in exotic places and deal with unusual challenges during field research. Few of us, however, take the time to write memoirs or describe to a general audience the rewards and tribulations of our profession. In his 90th year, Kees Vermeer has done just that, producing an entertaining memoir that is an easy mix of his unique personal life and his laudable scientific and conservation achievements. Vermeer is well known as a major contributor to seabird research in Canada and the eastern Pacific, plus pioneering studies on the effects of oil pollution and pesticides on wildlife.

The book has four main parts. Part 1 covers Vermeer's immigration in 1954 to Canada from the Netherlands, beginning with a range of jobs in British Columbia (including farm worker, labourer and railway survey technician), and then progressing to his university education (BSc, MSc and PhD). Part 2 covers his 30-year career with the Canadian Wildlife Service in Alberta and B.C. Among his numerous achievements, Vermeer initiated research on the ecology and behaviour of many B.C. seabirds, both on colonies and at sea. His work is the foundation for many of today's studies and long-term monitoring. In the 1970s, he initiated research that continues today on Triangle Island, B.C.'s largest seabird colony. The text and photos nicely capture the joys and trepidations of wildlife research on B.C.'s remote islands and productive seas. In his later years Vermeer organized several symposia and published compendia on B.C. seabirds, which thoroughly summarized available knowledge. The current generation of marine ornithologists will appreciate the hard work and adventurous spirit that Vermeer and his contemporaries needed to initiate high-level research on seabirds. Vermeer was also one of the earliest members of the Pacific Seabird Group, and served as Chair in 1981.

Part 3 goes back to Vermeer's youth in the Netherlands, with memorable descriptions of life there in World War II, including the harrowing experience of sharing the family home with Nazi soldiers. Part 4 consists of tributes from fellow scientists, written on the occasion of his retirement in 1995. These give objective insights into the important contributions that Vermeer and his wife Rebecca made in ornithology and conservation. For example, his 1963 Master's thesis on Glaucous-winged Gulls challenged the clutch-size and colony-size hypotheses of some of the giants of evolutionary ecology at the time—Lack, Tinbergen and Fraser Darling. This was his first publication (Vermeer 1963), and it went on to become a Citation Classic.

The book includes a bibliography of over 160 of Vermeer's scientific publications. I doubt that anyone will ever rival the range of Canadian marine species or the quality of research his publications cover.

Those who know Vermeer will recognize, throughout the book, that he is a person who rows his own boat, sometimes ignoring directives from above in order to achieve his goals. This is a delightful book to read, with numerous interesting photos, celebrating a remarkable and meaningful life in nature. One can learn a lot about seabirds, too.

### REFERENCES

VERMEER, K. 1963. The breeding ecology of the Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*) on Mandarte Island, B.C. *Occasional Paper of the British Columbia Provincial Museum* 13: 1–104.

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## NEW(ISH) AND NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

FALL 2022

### *Living as a Bird*

DESPRET, V. 2021. (Translated by Helen Morrison.) Cambridge, England: Polity Press. 180 pp. Hardcover: ISBN 978-1-5095-4726-5, US\$64.95. Paperback: ISBN 978-1-5095-4727-2, US\$19.95. eBook: ISBN 978-1-5095-4728-9, US\$16.

Vinciane Despret is a philosopher at the University of Liège in Belgium, and one of the foundational thinkers in the field of animal studies. As such, she is concerned not as much with a bird's biology as she is with the biologists who conceive of that bird's biology, and then codify that conception as science. The result is a stimulating tour that considers, among other things, the ways the discipline uses words like "territory," "aggression," and so on. "Put another way," Despret writes at one point, "there are explanations which end up multiplying worlds and celebrating the emergence of an infinite number of modes of existence and others which seek to impose order, bringing them back to a few basic principles."

### *Shearwater: A Bird, an Ocean, and a Long Way Home*

MORGAN-GRENVILLE, R. 2021. London, England: Icon Books. 304 pp. Hardcover: ISBN 978-1-7857-8720-1, US\$27. Paperback: ISBN 978-1-7857-8859-8, US\$18.95.

"For as long as I can remember, I have chased her, more often in my imagination than out at sea," writes Roger Morgan-Grenville near the beginning of his book, *Shearwater*. "Schoolboy, soldier, trader, charity worker and writer; through all of those phases of my life she has been my metaphor for wilderness and adventure, always free, always out there, always just beyond reach." 'Her' here is the Manx Shearwater, which Morgan-Grenville first encountered as a child at the Isle of Mull among the Inner Hebrides. What follows is a satisfying if now conventional blend of natural history, memoir, and travelogue, as Morgan-Grenville traces as well as any human can the shearwater's long flightpaths over the sea.

### *Ospreys: The Revival of a Global Raptor*

POOLE, A.F. 2019. Baltimore, USA, Johns Hopkins University Press. 205 pp., color photographs and illustrations throughout. Hardcover: ISBN 978-1-4214-2715-7, US\$42.

While perhaps not technically a seabird, the osprey certainly moves in and among seabirds' circles from time to time. *Ospreys* tells the story of the species' recovery since its precipitous population declines in the 1950s and 60s—generally understood to be one of the most successful recoveries in the field of conservation. Writing with a warm, personal style, Poole presents chapters on osprey natural history and biology. His is a global view, situating ospreys within larger geographic and geopolitical contexts. All in all, a thorough and handsome book.

### *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives*

MALESIC, J. 2022. Oakland, USA: University of California Press. 288 pp. Hardcover: ISBN 978-0-5203-4407-5, US\$27.95. Paperback: ISBN 978-0-5203-9152-9, US\$24.95.

As the pandemic lurches along, burnout is a word we have definitely heard from people—friends, colleagues, neighbors, passers-by—when they talk about their state of being. Malesic, a former religious studies professor who now teaches writing, felt burned out, too—so much so, that he quit his tenured faculty position at a small college and started to investigate the concept. He traces burnout from its historical identities—acedia, melancholia, neurasthenia—to its more modern iteration as a pathology of "Passion Never Rests" Total Work culture. Along the way, he argues against letting our jobs define who we are, even if they are jobs we love. Really, he says, we have better things to do.

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## THE OCEAN'S WHISTLEBLOWER: THE REMARKABLE LIFE AND WORK OF DANIEL PAULY

GRÈMILLET, D. 2019. (Translated by Georgia Lyon Froman). Vancouver, Canada: Greystone Books. 350 pp., including appendices, index, 40 black & white photos. Hardcover: ISBN 978-1-77164-754-0, CA\$38.95.

*The Ocean's Whistleblower*, by David Grèmillet, covers the life of Daniel Pauly, the well-known fisheries biologist now at the University of British Columbia. Because so much seabird work is closely tied to fisheries management, the book is valuable for anyone who would like to develop a fuller understanding of fisheries science—how we got where we are, how fisheries management has progressed based on Pauly's work, and so on. Readers will learn a lot from it—especially younger seabird biologists, or biologists looking to expand their own research or thoughts into fisheries management. It is relevant to people all over the world, as Pauly's work has global applicability. And by placing it in the context of the life of this remarkable scientist, Grèmillet makes the science and policy fun and accessible.

Reading like popular historical non-fiction, *The Ocean's Whistleblower* drew me in from the start, giving a rare glimpse into the life of the man who I had until now only really seen through scientific papers or in talks. The first few chapters are more of a history lesson than they are about fisheries necessarily, focusing as they do on Pauly's upbringing, first in France and then in Switzerland and Germany. Grèmillet writes of how certain political or historical currents shaped the younger Pauly. This was interesting—when I think about fisheries all day long at work, the last thing I want to do in my off hours is read a book about fisheries—and I was not expecting the depth and breadth of detail, or the historical twists and turns.

The book then moves to Pauly's extensive career in fisheries. This of course includes the field-shaping creations of Fishbase and Ecopath, as well as groundbreaking concepts of "fishing down marine food webs," and "shifting baselines." One thing I wished for more of were links between the younger Pauly and the older one. As the book moves to his career, prominent details from the first part don't get carried through. For instance, the early commentary on Pauly's socio-political views was fascinating, and his "Marxist leanings" are mentioned throughout. One might expect these views to shape Pauly's later life and work. Possibly they do—as I read, I could think about it and draw lines between concepts—but none of it was spelled out. I was left looking for more on how the world around Pauly shaped his future work.

A more substantial criticism I have was with the one-sided coverage of certain fisheries debates, coupled almost snarky remarks about people that disagreed with, contradicted, or countered Pauly, as if they were in the wrong professionally and scientifically. Some of these debates I am more familiar with, and as one who knows both sides of them, reading fairly non-objective portrayals could be frustrating. So much so that when it came to other debates that were less familiar to me, I was inclined to take what was said with a grain of salt, even if I was predisposed to side with Pauly in the first place.

One other thing I really wished for was a more explicit discussion on Pauly's work showing how we—either within fisheries science or in seabird science/policy circles—move forward. More specifically, by the end of the biography, I was hoping for a more positive final message. I'm always looking for this in things I read, given that a lot of what is written in conservation science can be doom-and-gloom. Although the book wraps up nicely in a final epilogue, this serves as more of a summary. I wanted some statements on what comes next, either from Pauly himself, those with whom he has worked, or those he inspired. How will we make changes based on what Pauly has clearly alerted us to? He has blown the whistle. Now what? I'm asking the questions again, and maybe that's the path forward.

Despite these shortcomings, though, *The Ocean's Whistleblower* and the life it covers were both inspiring. The book relit that spark I felt as a sophomore in college, when I learned about fisheries for the first time after watching the documentary "Empty Oceans, Empty Nets." I was reminded why I got into this field and how far we've come (and how much of that progress is due to Daniel Pauly), but also how far we have to go. At times the book made me angry, or left me questioning my decisions and the path I'm on. But most importantly, it got me asking questions, reminding me why I started down this path all those years ago.

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## NEW ZEALAND SEABIRDS: A NATURAL HISTORY

WILSON, K.-J. 2021. Nelson, New Zealand: Potton & Burton. 140 pp., colour photos and illustrations throughout. Hardcover: ISBN 978-1-9885-5025-1, NZ\$49.99.

The cover of *New Zealand Seabirds: A Natural History*, by Kerry-Jayne Wilson, features an image of Buller's Albatross. I guess it is appropriate, but I would have much preferred one of Wilson's Storm Petrel. It's true that the naming of Wilson's Storm Petrel has nothing to do with Kerry-Jayne and that it breeds in the Antarctic, perhaps putting it seemingly outside the purview of a book about New Zealand seabirds. However, given that New Zealand claims the Ross Dependency in Antarctica, and given that the Wilson's Storm Petrel's seasonal migrations can take them through New Zealand's waters, I don't think it would have been too much of a stretch to showcase the diminutive seabirds named in Kerry-Jayne's likeness. As Kerry-Jayne says in the book, "These little birds can appear so fragile, yet I have watched Wilson's Storm Petrels pitter-patter along the water surface, pecking at plankton during an Antarctic storm in 10-metre breaking waves."

The Ross Dependency is where I first met Kerry-Jayne in 1977, at an isolated field hut on Ross Island. I had gone there to study Adélie Penguins. Kerry-Jayne arrived on a helicopter a few weeks later, carrying a spotting scope and a bottle of Canadian Club whiskey. It was hard not to admire her priorities.

While I was out in the penguin colony conducting my research, Kerry-Jayne would set up her scope on a table in front of our green-painted wooden box of a hut. For the entire day, she would scan the horizon every few minutes recording any animals she saw. Without her dedication and keen eye, I doubt that I would have seen my first Sei Whale, my first Southern Giant Petrel, and certainly not my first Wilson's Storm Petrel. A Wilson's Storm Petrel is a tiny, fragile sliver of a bird that often flits just above the surface of the sea. Even through the spotting scope, it looked like no more than a dot to me. But Kerry-Jayne had come to Antarctica after two years of censusing birds and whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence for Memorial University of Newfoundland, where she had memorized the distinguishing characteristics of virtually all seabirds. And not just their size, shape and colouration, but also their flight patterns and behaviours. "It's a Wilson's Storm Petrel alright," she told me. Despite the bird being kilometres away and no bigger than a robin, she had made out the white patch on its rump as it fluttered across the sea's surface in the gaps between the ice floes. Honestly, I wouldn't have been surprised if she had also told me what sex it was and what it had eaten for breakfast.

That night we opened the whiskey and Kerry-Jayne told me another thing she had learnt in Newfoundland: "you never put a cap on a bottle." Together with Paul, the other person staying in the hut, we duly drank the entire contents of the bottle. Before climbing into our bunks, Kerry-Jayne drank seven glasses of water. This caused some consternation for the rest of us, as, at that stage in the season, we got our drinking water by fetching snow from a distant snowbank and then melting it. Seven glasses represented a lot of snow to fetch. Yet Kerry-Jayne gulped down the water, insisting it would rehydrate her brain and prevent a hangover. As it was, Paul and I were up at 7am, while Kerry-Jayne lay prone in her bunk groaning until well after mid-day. If she were capable of making sounds that resembled a language, I'm sure she would have said something pithy – that was her forte – but on this one occasion, speech eluded her.

It did not on another occasion, which occurred a few days later. Our alcohol stocks much-depleted, Kerry-Jayne had shared some green leafy material with us. Suddenly ravenous, she went to our storeroom and broke open a wooden box of sledging biscuits left behind by an earlier expedition. The box had stencilled on it: *John Darby 1965–66*. Biting into one of the 12-year-old biscuits, Kerry-Jayne announced in her laconic drawl, "Poor John Darby, they gave the bastard stale biscuits." I'm still laughing.

Over the next 45 years that I knew Kerry-Jayne as a friend, she would prove to me time and again that those initial impressions were wholly accurate. She had the driest sense of humour of anyone I've ever known. She was generous and loyal, always happy to share with you what was hers, be it whiskey or whatever. And she would do anything – even crazy things – despite any risks of being killed, maimed, hurt or just needing a bucketload of Paracetamol, as long as it involved getting her close to her first love: seabirds.

Kerry-Jayne managed to survive all that life threw at her – and, arguably, all that she threw at it – for 73 years, until eventually she succumbed to cancer earlier this year. This was the worst kind of cancer, the aggressive kind, the kind that when you first learn about it your doctor gives you weeks, months at best. I don't think Kerry-Jayne ever thought that she would die, even when stuck up a sheer cliff-face for days while on an isolated island by herself, even when falling into the Ross Sea where nothing but a very small piece of ice kept her body half afloat until we could pull her out, even when having a Fiordland Penguin slice through the septum of her nose so that she nearly bled to death. However, when it came to the cancer, she wasn't so much determined to beat it – she knew that was impossible – as she was determined to delay it. She had one final project she wanted to complete: her book on New Zealand seabirds.

*New Zealand Seabirds: A Natural History* is much more than just a compendium of information about New Zealand's seabirds – it is more like a love letter to seabirds. Sure, it has the usual encyclopaedic type of information about the different types of seabirds, their scientific names, where they are found and their conservation status. Most of the book, however, is devoted to extolling their virtues: their breeding and how they manage the balance between foraging at sea and breeding on land, their relationship with the marine environment, their amazing migrations, and the threats many of them face. Throughout the book, which is richly illustrated with coloured photographs and diagrams, Kerry-Jayne uses the stories of individual species to highlight the general points she is making. Among other examples, we learn about the foraging segregation of Gibson's and Antipodean Albatrosses, the migratory patterns of Sooty Shearwaters, the threats to terns and gulls using braided rivers in New Zealand's South Island, and brood reduction in penguins. There are so many seabirds that call New Zealand home that it would be impossible in a book of 136 pages to go into them all in great detail, but by cleverly telling us such stories about the likes of Chatham Petrels, Little Penguins and even that poser, the Buller's Albatross, we get to know the birds in far greater depth than we should have a right to expect from a book of its length.

In a sense though, this deserves to be as much a coffee table book as it does a reference book. The generous size of the pages, the high-quality paper they are printed on, and the lavish use of illustrations make for a book that is as beautiful as it is informative. Reading the book from cover to cover, Kerry-Jayne takes us on a journey from what are seabirds, to where they are found, to what they do, to how they are faring. The book, however, works equally well in its coffee table guise: the bite-sized stories and a layout festooned with coloured break-out boxes makes for the sort of book we can pick up and dive into anywhere, like gleeful gannets, confident of being treated to some satisfying morsels.

Kerry-Jayne's writing style is direct, authoritative, and dripping with information, as befits someone who was recognized for her excellence in teaching during 23 years as a lecturer at Lincoln University. The opening lines to her last chapter epitomise the way she does not mince her words: "Seabirds are in trouble – not just in New Zealand but worldwide. Seabirds are more at risk than any comparable group of birds."

Kerry-Jayne was not just an admirer of seabirds, but also their champion – so much so that in 2019, she was recognized for her services to seabird conservation, being made a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit. Perhaps that is why I like the comparison

with Wilson's Storm Petrels so much. Small in stature, she was nevertheless tough beyond belief. In her life, she was in many ways a pioneer, although her modesty was such that she regarded as small steps what, for the rest of us, were really giant leaps. New Zealand's seabirds can be thankful for having such a person in their corner.

My life beyond penguins involves teaching science communication. Sometimes I have gotten New Zealand's pre-eminent landscape painter, Grahame Sydney, to talk to my students. He would always tell them the same thing: spend your life working to produce the one thing that you would "pin to your headstone." It is an admonition to create something useful and remarkable, to be the best that you can be. I know Kerry-Jayne well enough to know that she wouldn't give a damn about a headstone, but I also know her well enough to know that, if she did, *New Zealand Seabirds: A Natural History* is the thing that she would pin to it.

It is a testimony to Kerry-Jayne Wilson's determination that, in the face of a cancer far worse than any 10-metre breaking wave, she was able to finish her book and see it published. In lieu of it ever gracing her headstone, I suggest that you get it and put it on your bookshelf or coffee table. This is Kerry-Jayne's parting gift to us all.

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