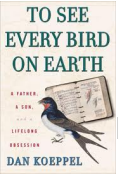
To See Every Bird on Earth [1]



Microhistories are a subgenre of non-fiction books which take a particular subject or single event and through intensive historical research try to contextualize the chosen subject within the broader picture. Both Simon Winchester [2] and Mark Kurlansky [3] are well known microhistorians. Kurlansky in particular is known for *Salt: A World History* [4], *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* [5], and *The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell* [6]. As a history nerd, I find that a well written microhistory uncovers a previously unthought-of subject or event and breathes life into the history cannon as a whole. Curious? Check out titles like *Aspirin: The Remarkable Story of a Wonder Drug* [7], *Just My Type: A Book About Fonts* [8], or *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* [9]. Several years ago I read and enjoyed a microhistory called *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World* [10] by Dan Koeppel.

The Banana book led me to another book by Koeppel called *To See Every Bird on Earth: A Father, a Son, and a Lifelong Obsession* [11]. This book is part microhistory, part memoir and is shelved (appropriately) in the bird section next to bird identification books. Koeppel is primarily an outdoor journalist and has written a very intimate book about his father and his life as a Big Lister. This book takes you both into the world of the Koeppel family (the memoir part) but also into the world of birds, bird identification and the few people in the world who have seen and listed more than 6,000 bird species (the microhistory part). Koeppel tries to answer the questions about obsession, science, nature, competition, and family dynamics - and does a good job of guiding those not obsessed with birds through this new world. The details about their family dovetail nicely with the birding world to make for a very interesting read. I would suggest this title for anyone who enjoys nature writing and doesn't mind something a little personal.
Posted by sbowman on March 24, 2012

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To see every bird on earth : a father, a son, and a lifelong obsession [18]

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[3] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?cbx=1,1033,0,0,7&type=Keyword&term=kurlansky,%20mark&by=KW&sort=RELEVANCE&limit=COL=n6&query=&page=0
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