

## **Birdwatcher: The Life of Roger Tory Peterson**

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**Birdwatcher: The Life of Roger Tory Peterson.**—Elizabeth J. Rosenthal. 2008. The Lyons Press, Guilford, CT. 427 pp., 27 photographs (13 in color). ISBN 978-1-59921-294-4. \$29.95 (hardcover).

This is the second biography of Roger Tory Peterson published in 2008, the 100th anniversary of Peterson's birth (for a review of Douglas Carlson's *Roger Tory Peterson: A Biography* see *The Condor* 110:399–400). It is no surprise that Peterson has received this much attention, because he is generally acknowledged as a major player in the historical development of birdwatching and the conservation movement, a contributor to scientific ornithology, and a major bird artist. As an artist/naturalist he was responsible for inspiring an interest in birds by people around the world.

Rosenthal's book consists of eight parts, divided into 19 chapters. The first part, Fledging, traces Peterson's early life, his development as an artist, his years in New York with the Bronx County Bird Club and the Linnaean Society, his revolutionary 1934 *A Field Guide to the Birds* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston), which became the grand-daddy of all modern field guides, and his years with the National Association of Audubon Societies (National Audubon Society). It also details many of his disagreements with Audubon's president John Baker and the first challenge to the pre-eminence of Peterson's field guides by Richard Pough's *Audubon Bird Guide: Eastern Land Birds* (1946, Doubleday, Garden City, NY). The second part deals with Peterson's trips to Europe and the production, in 1954, of a European equivalent of his American field guides. This section also covers his trip around North America with British ornithologist James Fisher, which they chronicled in their book *Wild America* (1955, Houghton Mifflin, Boston). Widely read, *Wild America* stimulated the development of birdwatching and conservation. Part three deals with the more personal side of Peterson, his 32-year marriage to Barbara Coulter Peterson (the second of his three wives), their home in Old Lyme, Connecticut, their children, Peterson's obsession with birds, and his personality quirks. Part four treats Peterson's heavy involvement in conservation organizations, including his chairing the U.S. section of the International Council for Bird Preservation and his work with the National Wildlife Federation and the World Wildlife Fund. He played a role in the preservation of the Coto Doñana in Spain and Lake Nakuru in Kenya, as well as the banning of DDT in the United States. He also promoted conservation as a lecturer in his ecotourism adventures with Lars-Eric Lindblad throughout the world. Part five discusses at length the people Peterson mentored and/or influenced, including Peter Alden, William Burt, Peter Dunne, Victor Emanuel, Robert Hernandez, Lars Jonsson, Kenn Kaufman, Thomas Lovejoy, Fleur Ng'weno, David Sibley, Paul Spitzer, and E. O. Wilson. This section also includes a chapter on Peterson's re-involvement with the National Audubon Society as part of Audubon lecture tours and as an author for *Audubon* magazine. Also treated are his desire to do more bird art, in contrast to the bird illustrations of his field guides, and his involvement with the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum and Mill Pond Press, which sold his limited-edition prints. The concluding section

chronicles the challenges to the supremacy of his field guides and the pain he suffered when his 1980 revision of the eastern guide drew criticism from both friends and detractors. The final chapter describes his continued travels (he nearly drowned in a boating accident off the Maine coast) and his consolidating his legacy through establishing the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History in Jamestown, New York. The remainder of the book consists of acknowledgments, sources, chapter notes, further reading (18 entries), and index.

The section on sources lists 112 people whom Rosenthal interviewed, and the book contains numerous quotes, often extensive, from people on this list. This aspect may annoy some readers, but I found it pleasant and informative and think that it provides a real sense of Peterson's personality, influence, accomplishments, and, in a few instances, less desirable characteristics. The quotes impart a personal tone to the book and a warmth often lacking in straight descriptive prose. I interviewed and conversed with Peterson on several occasions, and this book's quotes and descriptions jibe with my recollections of him. Rosenthal does not shy away from some of the difficulties in Peterson's life, for example,

that he was something of an absentee parent, often spending half the year away from home, or that he developed a preoccupation with aging and death. I think that Rosenthal, through a skillful use of quotations, has presented a very readable picture of Roger Tory Peterson, his life, and his accomplishments.

I was bothered by a few stylistic anomalies. Although there are 21 pages of chapter notes, there are no citations in text, presumably a sacrifice to readability, and the notes are listed alphabetically rather than in their order in text. There is no bibliography of Peterson's written works or his illustrated books and articles, information that would be of general interest and of significance to future historians. There is also only a partial listing of the many honors Peterson received. Nevertheless, I find this a well-researched, and endearing account of a man who, despite lack of formal academic training, became known as the "King Penguin," an icon signifying his strong influence on the development of so many birdwatchers, conservationists, and ornithologists. I enjoyed the book thoroughly and recommend it highly.—WILLIAM E. DAVIS, JR., Boston University, 23 Knollwood Drive, East Falmouth, MA 02536. E-mail: [wedavis@bu.edu](mailto:wedavis@bu.edu).