

Books to Feed the Mind and Soul

Melissa Leasia. January 2, 2021 :

Thank you to the Audubon Rockies staff and Colorado Chapter leaders who have shared the following list of some of their favorite books to help us through these cold, dark, socially-distanced nights. The list, including nature-oriented, conservation-minded, humorous, and other engaging reads, is in no particular order.

Comments on many of the books were provided by the contributors. Enjoy!

- ***The Feather Thief: Beauty, Obsession, and the Natural History Heist of the Century*** by Kirk Wallace Johnston, “A nonfiction tale of the British Museum of Natural History, home to one of the largest ornithological collections in the world, and obsession, nature, and man’s unrelenting desire to lay claim to its beauty.”
- ***Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird*** by Katie Fallon
- ***Signature of All Things*** by Elizabeth Gilbert
- ***A Season on the Wind: Inside the World of Spring Migration*** by Kenn Kaufman
- ***The Genius of Birds*** and ***The Bird Way*** by Jennifer Ackerman
- ***The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man’s Love Affair with Nature*** by J. Drew Lanham, “From these fertile soils—of love, land, identity, family, and race—emerges *The Home Place*, a big-hearted, unforgettable memoir by ornithologist J. Drew Lanham.”
- ***A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*** by Scott Leicensaul
- ***Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*** by David Abram
- ***The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession*** by Mark Obmascik, “Journalist Obmascik creates a dazzling, fun narrative of the 275,000-mile odyssey of three obsessive birders as they fight to win the greatest—or maybe worst—birding contest of all time.”
- ***Superdove: How the Pigeon Took Manhattan*** by Courtney Humphries
- ***The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*** by Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy
- ***Saving Wild: Inspiration from 50 Leading Conservationists*** by Lori Robinson, “Full of inspiration & hope, this book is an antidote for anyone who suffers from ecological despair over the current state of our planet’s wildlife and wild places. Hear from leading conservationists who have devoted their lives to save some of the most endangered species and Earth’s most threatened areas.”
- ***The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*** by Elizabeth Kolbert (Pulitzer Prize, 2015), “This book argues that Earth is in the midst of a modern, man-made, 6th extinction, and chronicles previous mass extinction events, comparing them to the accelerated, widespread extinctions during our present time.”
- ***Nature Matrix: New and Selected Essays*** by Robert Michael Pyle
- ***A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*** by Aldo Leopold, “This book by ecologist, forester, and early environmentalist, Aldo Leopold, informed and changed the environmental

movement and stimulated a widespread interest in ecology as a science.”

- ***Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*** by Terry Tempest Williams
- ***Atlas of a Lost World: Travels in Ice Age America*** by Craig Childs, “This book chronicles the last millennia of the Ice Age, the violent oscillations and retreat of glaciers, and sheds light on the clues and traces that document the first encounters of early humans and the animals.”
- ***The Black-Tailed Prairie Dog: Social Life of a Burrowing Mammal*** by John L. Hoogland
- ***The Desert Year*** by Joseph Wood Krutch
- ***Shadowlands: Fear and Freedom at the Oregon Standoff*** by Anthony McCann, “This is an examination of the 2016 Malheur National Wildlife Refuge takeover.”
- ***Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*** by Ben Goldfarb, “This is the powerful story of one of the world’s most influential species, how our landscapes have changed over the centuries, and how beavers can help us fight drought, flooding, wildfire, extinction, & climate change.”
- ***Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk: A Modest Bestiary*** by David Sedaris, “A unique blend of hilarity and heart, this new, illustrated collection of animal-themed tales bears an uncanny resemblance to the insanity of everyday life.”
- ***Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*** by Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Drawing on her life as an indigenous scientist and as a woman, Kimmerer shows how other living beings offer us gifts and lessons, even if we’ve forgotten how to hear their voices.”
- ***The Spine of the Continent: The Most Ambitious Wildlife Conservation Project Ever Undertaken*** by Mary Ellen Hannibal, “An introduction to the most ambitious conservation effort ever undertaken: the effort to link protected areas extending from the Yukon to Mexico, the entire length of North America.”
- ***Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinction*** by David Quammen, “The author, a widely acclaimed science writer, gives us the story of both our survival and demise as a species. He focuses mainly on the question: Why have island ecosystems always suffered such high rates of extinction? There’s a fascinating episode in which he visits the island of Komodo and hikes in the area where there are wild Komodo dragons.”
- ***Grinnell: America’s Environmental Pioneer and his Restless Drive to Save the West*** by John Taliaferro, “Before Rachel Carson, there was George Bird Grinnell, the son of a New York merchant who saw a different future for a nation in the thrall of the Industrial Age. The alarm that Grinnell sounded spark America’s conservation movement.”
- ***Nature’s Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*** by Douglas W. Tallamy, “Using science, in a very readable manner, with lovely color photos, the author proposes a new idea of conservation that begins with individuals’ choices and takes place on private lands.”
- ***Dirt: A Love Story*** by Barbara Richardson, “A beautifully written book that explores our relationship with dirt, soil, and soil ecosystems.”
- ***Sage Spirit: The American West at a Crossroads*** by Dave Showalter, “Showalter pairs his striking photographs of the people and wildlife of western sagebrush-steppes with words of wisdom from Rick Bass, David Sibley, and other eminent conservationists.”

- ***Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, a Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World*** by Noah Stryker, “In 2015, the author set himself a lofty goal: to become the first person to see half the world’s birds in one year ... 7 continents, 41 countries, over 6,000 species!”
- ***In Search of the Canary Tree*** by Lauren Oakes, “This young scientist’s view of climate change includes a remarkable description of the difficulty of doing field research.”
- ***The Green New Deal and Beyond: Ending the Climate Emergency While We Still Can*** by Stan Cox, “A clear and urgent call for the national, social, and individual changes required to prevent catastrophic climate change.”
- ***A Naturalist in Florida: A Celebration of Eden*** and ***Windward Road: Adventures of a Naturalist on Remote Caribbean Shores*** by Archie Carr
- ***The Wind Birds: Shorebirds of North America*** by Peter Matthiessen, “Matthiessen captures the essence of the world’s most fascinating group of birds, conveying the biological and behavioral intricacies of shorebirds without dulling their romance and wonder.”
- ***On Human Nature*** (Pulitzer Prize, 1979); ***The Ants*** (Pulitzer Prize, 1991); ***The Social Conquest of Earth***; and ***Letters to a Young Scientist***, all by E.O. Wilson