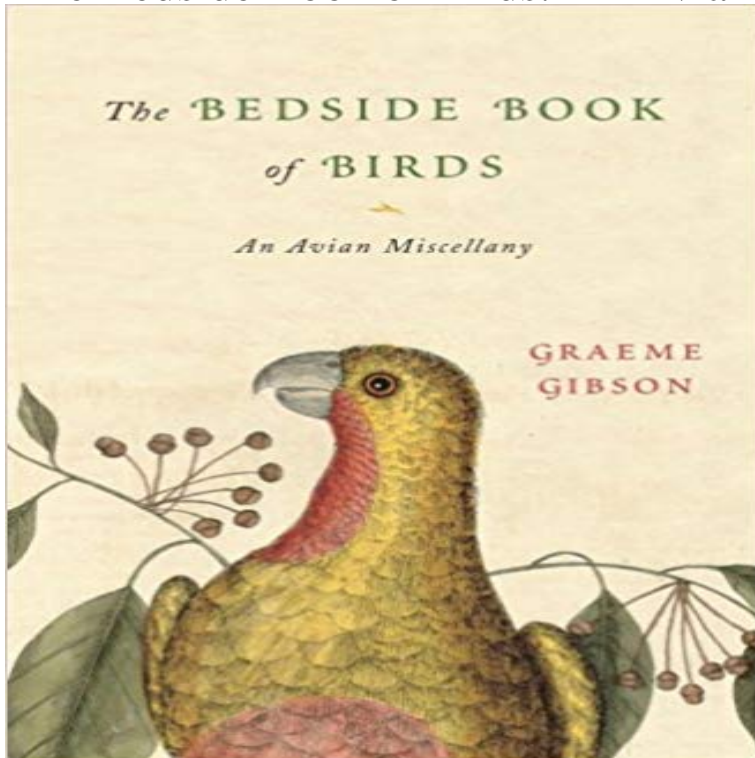


The Bedside Book of Birds: An Avian Miscellany



In this stunning assemblage of words and images, novelist and avid birdwatcher Graeme Gibson has crafted an extraordinary tribute to the venerable relationship between humans and birds. Birds have ever been the symbols of our highest aspirations. As divine messengers, symbols of our yearning for the heavens, or avatars of glorious song and colour, they have stirred our imaginations from the moment we first looked into the sky. Whether as the Christian dove, or Quetzalcoatl the Aztec Plumed Serpent or in Plato's vision of the human soul growing wings and feathers, religion and philosophy have looked to birds as representatives of our better selves that part of us not bound to the earth. With the passion of a birdwatcher and hoarder of words, Gibson has spent fifteen years collecting the literary and artistic forms our affinity for birds has taken over the centuries. Birds appear again and again in mythology and folk tales, and in literature by writers as diverse as Ovid, Thomas Hardy, Kafka, Thoreau and T.S. Eliot. They've been omens, allegories, disguises and guides; they've been worshipped, eaten, feared and loved. Nor does Gibson forget the fascination they hold for science, as the Galapagos finches did for Darwin. Birds figure charmingly and tellingly in the work of such nature writers as Gilbert White, Peter Matthiessen, Farley Mowat and Barry Lopez. Gorgeously illustrated, woven from centuries of human response to the delights of the feathered tribes, *The Bedside Book of Birds* is for anyone who is aware of birds, and for everyone who is intrigued by the artistic forms that humanity has created to represent its soul. From *The Bedside Book of Birds* ~Stevenson remembered the story of a monk who had been distracted from his copy-work by the song of a bird. He went into the garden to listen more closely, and when he returned, after what

he thought were only a few minutes, he discovered that a century had gone by, that his fellow monks were dead and his ink had turned to dust. The song of the bird had given him a taste of Paradise, where an instant is as a hundred years of earthly time. Was the same true of time in hell, Stevenson asked himself. Alberto Manguel

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