

RARE BIRDS: THE EXTRAORDINARY TALE OF THE BERMUDA PETREL AND THE MAN WHO BROUGHT IT BACK FROM EXTINCTION.—Gehrman, Elizabeth. 2012. Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts. 240 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8070-1076-1. \$26.95.

In an era when global climate change, increasing human populations, and resource consumption combine with other drivers to threaten birds and their habitats around the world, and when the outlook for conservation appears particularly grim, success stories are especially needed to bolster morale and provide inspiration. Elizabeth Gehrman's telling of the tale of how the Bermuda Petrel (*Pterodroma cahow*) or Cahow, long thought to have succumbed to the pressures of hunting, habitat loss, and introduced predators, was not only rediscovered, but also brought back from the precipice of extinction, is both supremely entertaining and informative. From the moment in 1951 that the great Robert Cushman Murphy, with a young David Wingate at his side, reached into a burrow and pulled out a young seabird, exclaiming, "By gad, the Cahow," historic acts were set in motion. Gehrman writes, "A lifelong obsession had been born" in the young Wingate. This obsession would transform our approach to the conservation of many species—not just birds—and it would move this iconic seabird off the cliff of extinction.

But inspiration is not the only reason to read this book. *Rare Birds* also presents an approach to conservation that is of value to ornithologists and land managers, and to others who want or need to evaluate conservation efforts. Here Gehrman describes Wingate's efforts to encourage and protect nesting Cahows, and his careful nursing of the species' increase where success was counted one fledgling at a time. But she also highlights Wingate's systematic approach to restoring habitat which would allow the species to nest and flourish on its own. Here we read of his fight against invasive vegetation and animals, and the careful nurturing of plants, stem by stem, that he grew to recreate on Nonsuch Island habitat typical of Bermuda before Europeans arrived. It is this presentation of the labor-intensive work within a long-term vision for restoring vitally important habitat that is of such importance in Wingate's career and in Gehrman's book. It

has served as a model for other conservation strategies, including recent efforts to begin the recovery of the closely-related Black-capped Petrel (*P. hasitata*) on Hispaniola, a species which Wingate himself had a hand in bringing back to the attention of ornithologists.

Rare Birds is well-written and entertaining. By turns riveting, tragic, enlightening, and educational, Gehrman's book draws on what seems to be a wealth of written material from scientific journals and the popular press documenting the odyssey of David Wingate and others in their fight for the Cahow. The author has also clearly spent much valuable time interviewing many of those who worked with Wingate or had some other role in the Cahow recovery program. But she often quotes Wingate himself at length, and these are often some of the best paragraphs in the account, allowing Wingate to tell the Cahow story from his point of view. Of course, as in any tale born of obsession, there are high points and low points, triumphs and failures, unity and conflict; and neither Gehrman nor Wingate himself shy away from the lows, the failures, or the conflicts. That, of course, adds to the excellent readability of the book, but more importantly it contributes significantly to the valuable lessons that we as conservationists can gain from Gehrman's telling.

One need not be a specialist in Atlantic seabirds to appreciate this story—the heroic nature of the tale, and the broad applicability of the lessons learned, are more than enough reason to enjoy *Rare Birds*. My only wish is that the publisher had thought to include photographs as well. Seeing just how the habitat was restored, historic photos including those of some of the key actors in this drama, and illustrations of some of the recovery techniques would fill out the story and, I think, increase its impact on the reader. Nevertheless, it's a small miss in an otherwise wonderful book. If you find inspiration in birds, in habitat restoration, in conservation, or even struggles with the forces of nature and stories of success, you will enjoy this book and find something to inspire your own work.

—Steven C. Latta

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