

Birding is not for the birds

A little bird named facebook told me that today is my friend Jim Renfro's birthday.

Which is reason enough to address a subject and make a book recommendation that I've had on my to-do list.

Jim is a retired engineer, a current (I guess; we haven't visited in a while) member of a chain gang (not in a penitentiary but on the Houston Texans sideline) and a bona fide nature lover.



By Ron Rozelle

He was also, nearly 20 years ago, a valuable resource for yours truly.

When I was researching and writing *The Windows of Heaven*, a historical novel set in Galveston during the famous 1900 hurricane, I needed to know about the behavior of birds when mighty storms are about to make land-fall. The obvious guy to call was Jim, and the result of our visit was my writing like I knew what I was talking about rather than winging it (pun intended).

My wife, Karen, is very much into birds also, keeping a big pair of binoculars close to her in the back yard to watch for a pair of hawks that swoop over occasionally and for any other feathered friends that flock to feeders that she keeps filled with sunflower seeds.

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Interested in birding? Here's some recommendations

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So we have several books about birds and field guides at Casa Rozelle. I must admit that while I have no objection to birds my interest in them isn't anywhere near Jim's or Karen's.

I enjoy counting hawks with Karen when we're driving during those handsome raptors' traveling seasons, but I wouldn't be interested in doing a "big year," the apparent zenith of diehard birding where you spend a full year finding and identifying as many varieties of birds as you can in as many places as you can get to. My big year would have to be confined to our patio, I'm afraid.

But in honor of Jim Renfro's birthday I'll recommend a book that Karen likes about one person's big year. It's "Extreme Birder: One

Woman's Big Year," by Lynn E. Barber (Texas A&M University Press, 2011). While I'm at it, I'll also recommend a good movie called "The Big Year," with Jack Black, Steve Martin and Owen Wilson, who play globetrotters in pursuit of the highest number of sightings.

By the way, I looked up the origin of the phrase "strictly for the birds". The most commonly given definition is that it was originally used to identify something that was as meaningless as horse manure, since birds were the most frequent partakers of that particular substance.

But the title of today's entry – which might in fact be for the birds – is in no way indicative of birding, an admirable pursuit, or of birders, observant souls who see beauty and poetry where many folks only see birds.

Happy birthday, Jim. May your skies be full of birds.

Ron Rozelle's columns can be accessed at ronrozellewordsmith.wordpress.com. He is the author of "Writer's Digest's Write Great Fiction: Description & Setting," and nine other books of fiction and nonfiction.

Binoculars make for easier birding

You need a binocular to see the birds. You will soon discover an ironic fact.

The best birders have the best binoculars – even though they can identify a bird 100 yards away by its silhouette. Newcomers with a cheap binocular see a fuzzy ball of feathers and don't have a clue which bird it is.

There is an unbelievable difference between a \$59 binocular and a \$1,500 binocular. For help in selecting the right binocular, at the right price, see the Binoculars & Scopes section of WildBirds.com.

Birders use binoculars with a magnification of 8 or 10. So look for a binocular that says it is 8x42 or 10x42, for example.

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