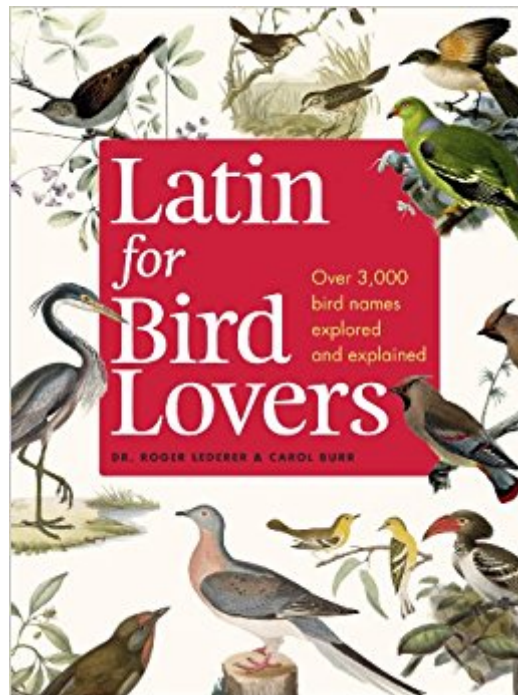




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Latin For Bird Lovers: Over 3,000 Bird Names Explored And Explained



Synopsis

While Latin is officially an "ancient" language, it's useful in so many areas of modern life, including bird watching. Birdwatchers need a universal language when they're speaking about birds, since common names vary by region. *Latin for Bird Lovers* answers this call, introducing more than 3,000 words to describe birds. Packed with tips on using Latin to identify birds by color, size, and behavior, this gorgeously illustrated, informative guide is perfect for birdwatchers, nature lovers, and both experts and beginners in ornithology and etymology.

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Customer Reviews

Book Review: 'Latin for Bird Lovers' by Roger Lederer and Carol Burr
The often delightful stories behind birds' scientific names.
By RICHARD CONNIFF
May 23, 2014 3:46 p.m. ET
By Roger Lederer and Carol Burr
Timber Press, 223 pages, \$24.95
Scientific names, those sometimes cumbersome binomial identifiers, can be more entertaining than we may imagine--a point driven home by "Latin for Bird Lovers," a book by the husband-and-wife team of Roger Lederer, an ornithologist, and Carol Burr, an artist and former English professor. Their handsomely illustrated account of about 3,000 bird names tells us, among many other things, that the quail genus name *Excalfactoria* means roughly "source of heat" and derives from the Chinese practice of using these tiny birds as hand-warmers. Almost as oddly, turkey vultures travel under the genus name *Cathartes*, from the Greek *katharsis* meaning "cleansing" or "purifying." The name honors their work clearing away the dead. There's a genus of flycatchers named *Attila*,

"because of their aggressive nature, as in Attila the Hun." And such is the richness of avian biodiversity, there's also a bird genus named after Bleda the Hun, the brother Attila is said to have murdered en route to power. Most birders nervously avoid scientific names but paying attention to scientific names "opens up a whole new way of looking at and understanding birds." It reveals relationships and reminds us that similar-sounding common names--American robin and European robin, or meadowlark and lark--can give us false ideas about taxonomic connections. Though Mr. Lederer and Ms. Burr don't make this point, scientific naming also gives us the opportunity to utter the inexplicably delightful words *Upupa epops*, the name given to the common hoopoe, in imitation of its call. The best part of this book, for a beginning birder, will be the sidebars on biology and behavior that are liberally sprinkled among the dictionary-like name entries. Surprisingly, the actual name explanations that the authors offer are often less satisfying. It's useful to learn that bald eagles, which are of course not actually bald, get their common name from the word "piebald," meaning a patch of white. And I had not realized that robins are called "red-breast" because "orange was not a known color until the sixteenth century." Not all the entries have that much to do with Latin, you will note, and most run for little more than a sentence, with the co-authors explaining that they have been able to make room for further detail "only when we think the reader's curiosity might be piqued." So when they tell us that the scientific name *Limosa* comes from the Latin for "full of mud" while the common name "Black-tailed Godwit" seems to derive "from Old English, meaning good to eat," they offer no explanation of this apparent culinary contradiction. Likewise, we learn that the genus name of the ostrich, *Struthio*, "does not quite fit," because in classical Greek it means "camel sparrow"--but not how it got that name. One delightful exception to this parsimonious approach has to do with the naming not of a species, but of a spy. The writer Ian Fleming was living in Jamaica and birdwatching with the help of the fieldguide "Birds of the West Indies," when he decided that the author's name--James Bond--had the right strength and simplicity for the hero of his novels. When the real Bond, a Philadelphia ornithologist, discovered this identity theft years later, Fleming joked that he could retaliate by putting Fleming's name in an insulting fashion on "some particularly horrible species of bird."--Mr. Conniff is the author of "The Species Seekers: Heroes, Fools, and the Mad Pursuit of Life on Earth." Shortened from the original The Wall Street Journal article "Scientific names, those sometimes cumbersome binomial identifiers, can be more entertaining than we may imagine" a point driven home by Latin for Bird Lovers. The Wall Street Journal "Lederer and Burr enliven things with more than 250 colorful and detailed images, genus profiles, stories about famous birders and short

hits on topics such as beaks, feathers, bird songs and calls, and migration. It makes for a reference work with entertainment value. *Chicago Tribune* "This beautifully illustrated dictionary of 3,000 bird names trots out enlightening trivia. *The Week* "Sheds light on some of the world's most colorful and interesting birds. *BirdWatching* "Gorgeous illustrations fill the pages, making this Latin-heavy guide flutter to life with every brush stroke. All I can say is, checking out this book will be a real feather in your cap. *The Columbian* "A beautiful book. The illustrations are exquisite and the colors are very vivid. . . . This would be a wonderful reference book for the bird lover to have on hand. *Happy Little Bookworm* "An entertaining book, suitable for leisurely reading or as a present. *Tringa*

You can learn a lot about a bird from its scientific name. The descriptive terms that make up these names can identify species by color, size, or distribution, and may illuminate a hidden history or quality. *Latin for Bird Lovers* uncovers the secrets behind more than 3,000 scientific names. It also delves into bird behavior and reveals the fascinating discoveries of ornithologists: one debunked the myth that robins sing because they are happy, while another found that birdsong is regionally distinctive.

Saw this at a friend's and had to have it. There's plenty of bonus material and beautiful artwork, but mainly I just love decoding (and being able to pronounce) the Greek and Latin scientific names.

This is a book any birder must have in their collection. Contains near to 3000 bird scientific name meanings, ranging from tropical to northern or southern american species and all around the globe. Nice illustrations and other birding related topics as added bonus! A job well done.

Readable and informative and provides the Latin pronunciations. Beautiful illustrations, as well. I had gone in search of a Latin dictionary but, as a bird watching enthusiast, this is just what I needed.

What a fun book this is for birders. Have learned so much about the origins of latin bird names, plus there are a lot of great side stories included. Highly recommended.

My favourite book!

As a volunteer researcher for the zoo in our city, I like to know what scientific names mean, since those meaning often give an insight into what about the species inspired the naming in the first place. This book is very valuable for doing that for the birds.

Lovely book, beautiful pictures. After receiving my own copy I sent another copy as a birthday present.

This book is only for the serious, intellectual bird lovers. I wish the ink/print were a lot darker. This is difficult to see Errors on background color and foreground print not dark enough.

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