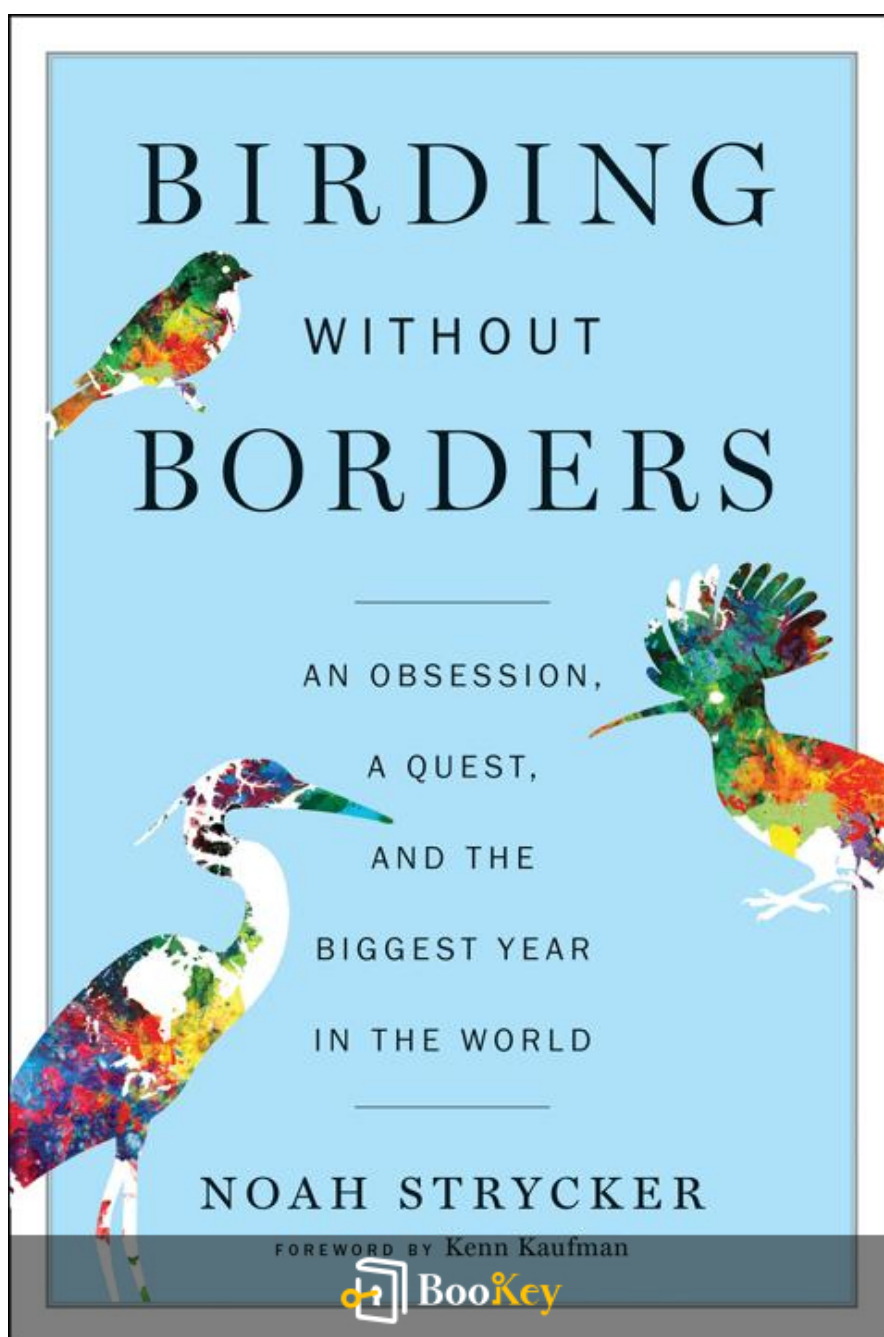


# Birding Without Borders PDF (Limited Copy)

Noah Strycker



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## **Birding Without Borders Summary**

An Epic Journey Through the World's Birds and Their Conservation.

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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## About the book

In "Birding Without Borders," Noah Strycker embarks on a remarkable journey to identify more than half of the world's 10,000 bird species within a single year. This ambitious quest takes him across 41 countries and all seven continents, armed only with a backpack and binoculars.

Throughout his 365-day adventure, Strycker faces a myriad of challenges that test his endurance and resolve. He contends with biting leeches in tropical rainforests, endures sleepless nights in remote locations, and navigates the complexities of ecological crises threatening bird populations. These trials, however, are balanced by joyful encounters with fellow birdwatchers and locals who share in his passion for avian life.

As Strycker progresses through different regions, he not only catalogs a rich variety of bird species but also reflects on the delicate state of global bird populations. His journey serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty of wildlife and the urgent need for conservation efforts. Through his eyes, readers gain insight into the myriad challenges these creatures face—from habitat destruction to climate change—while also witnessing the dedication of various organizations and individuals striving to protect them.

Overall, "Birding Without Borders" transcends a simple travel narrative; it becomes a heartfelt exploration of nature's wonders and the pressing need to

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preserve them, inviting readers to appreciate the world's avifauna and the fragile ecosystems they inhabit.

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## About the author

In "Birding Without Borders," Noah Strycker presents a compelling account of his extraordinary quest to observe as many bird species as possible within a single year, ultimately reaching an impressive total of 6,898. This journey takes him across various continents and ecosystems, where he encounters both the beauty of avian life and the pressing challenges of conservation.

The chapters chronicle Strycker's meticulous planning and execution of this ambitious goal, revealing the intricacies involved in birdwatching, from understanding migratory patterns to identifying species in diverse habitats. As he travels through rich landscapes—from the lush rainforests of Ecuador to the arid deserts of New Mexico—Strycker not only shares his observations but also weaves in reflections on the significance of birds in our lives and their fragile existence in the face of environmental changes.

Throughout his journey, Strycker introduces readers to a colorful array of characters, including fellow birdwatchers, local guides, and conservationists who share his passion. These interactions underscore the communal nature of birding and the friendships formed through shared experiences. Each chapter builds upon the last, illustrating not just the thrill of spotting new species but also the deeper understanding of humanity's connection to nature.

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The book serves as both an adventure tale and a call to action, emphasizing the vital importance of preserving bird habitats and fostering a greater awareness of biodiversity. Through Strycker's engaging narrative, readers are invited to appreciate the wonders of the avian world while being reminded of the responsibility that comes with our ability to observe and enjoy it.

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# Summary Content List

Chapter 1: End of the World

Chapter 2: The DSP

Chapter 3: Cerro Negro

Chapter 4: Over the Years

Chapter 5: The Harpy

Chapter 6: Gunning It

Chapter 7: An Angel of Peace

Chapter 8: Flying Free

Chapter 9: Home

Chapter 10: Missed Connections

Chapter 11: Photos

Chapter 12: Kalu

Chapter 13: The Karamoja Apalis

Chapter 14: A New World Record

Chapter 15: Hit and Miss

Chapter 16: Birds in Paradise

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Chapter 17: From End to End

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# Chapter 1 Summary: End of the World

## Chapter 1 Summary: End of the World

### Setting the Stage for a Unique Journey

On New Year's Day, a long-held tradition among birdwatchers is to note the first bird they see, believing it predicts their fortune for the year ahead.

Author Noah Strycker, fresh from a year marked by considerable personal upheaval, decides to take on a remarkable challenge: to identify 5,000 bird species within a single year. He marks the beginning of this ambitious quest in Antarctica, ringing in the New Year aboard a ship, optimistic that this will be the "Year of the Penguin."

### A World of Birds

Birds, embodying the essence of international freedom, flit effortlessly across global boundaries. Current estimates suggest billions of birds inhabit our planet, highlighting the staggering diversity of life. Strycker's fascination with birds traces back to his childhood, blossoming into a lifelong passion that has transformed his worldview, fueled by curiosity that drives his exploration.

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## Antarctic Expedition

Kicking off his journey, Strycker takes on the role of ornithologist aboard the ship in Antarctic waters. As the countdown to midnight approaches amidst a lively celebration, he grapples with disappointment at the absence of penguins. Feeling the thrill of adventure coupled with the challenge ahead, he decides to step outside alone, seeking a clearer view of the icy landscape.

### The First Bird of the Year

In the early hours, Strycker's patience is rewarded when he spots a dark silhouette gliding gracefully among the icebergs. With his binoculars, he identifies it as a Cape Petrel, a bird that embodies hope and potential, even though it diverges from his initial wish for a penguin. This sighting marks a hopeful start, ushering in what he whimsically dubs the "Year of the Petrel," hinting at the bountiful opportunities and experiences that lie ahead in his year-long adventure.

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# Chapter 2 Summary: The DSP

## Chapter 2 Summary

### Birding Ethics and Rules

In the realm of birding, adherence to specific ethical guidelines is paramount. The American Birding Association (ABA) stipulates that for a birder to officially count a bird on their list, it must be a living, wild specimen in its natural habitat—meaning dead birds, those in captivity, or sightings from zoos and webcams are excluded. This ethical framework underscores the importance of respecting wildlife and their habitats while fostering community efforts for conservation. Birders often navigate gray areas, such as whether to count birds that are only heard in the distance or seen from the borders of their typical habitats.

### Birding Scandals

The chapter addresses the rare but notable presence of dishonesty within the birding community, often manifesting in the actions of individuals known as "stringers," who fabricate sightings. Such behavior threatens the credibility of the community, yet birding largely thrives on self-regulation and a shared commitment to honesty. Minor infractions do occur, primarily revolving

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around the classification of introduced species, which can complicate a birder's tally.

## **The Diademed Sandpiper-Plover**

Transitioning to a personal quest, the author recounts the pursuit of the elusive Diademed Sandpiper-Plover (DSP), a striking shorebird endemic to the high-elevation regions of South America. Accompanied by local birders Fred Homer and Fernando Díaz Segovia, the expedition serves not only as a search for this unique bird but also as an exploration of the ecological challenges it faces in its diminishing natural habitat.

## **Adventures in the Andes**

As the group traverses the majestic yet formidable Andean landscape, the author reflects on both the breathtaking beauty and the harsh realities of the environment. Although the journey begins slowly in terms of the bird count for the year, a productive outing alongside local birders revitalizes the author's enthusiasm, reinforcing the bonds of camaraderie shared among those devoted to the craft of birdwatching.

## **Birding in Chile**

The chapter concludes in the cozy backyard of Fred's home in Santiago,

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where the author and his companions enjoy a communal meal enriched by local wine and spirited conversation. The evening culminates in a successful sighting of the Rufous-tailed Plantcutter, a joyful moment that encapsulates the intertwined themes of birdwatching, friendship, and a shared reverence for the natural world. This experience highlights how birding goes beyond mere observation; it fosters connections between people and their environment, deepening appreciation for both.

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# Chapter 3 Summary: Cerro Negro

## Cerro Negro

### Arrival in Jujuy

Noah Strycker touches down at a quiet airport in Jujuy, Argentina, feeling apprehensive about his pickup arrangement for a birding adventure organized by Freddy Burgos, a local enthusiast. Despite the language barrier and Freddy's vague plans for their camping trip, Noah maintains an optimistic outlook, buoyed by the pleasant weather and his previous birding success in the year.

### Birding with New Friends

Just days earlier, Noah enjoyed an exhilarating birdwatching experience in Entre Ríos province alongside local birders Marcelo and Martin. They enthusiastically cataloged a diverse range of bird species while Marcelo shared insights on sustainable ranching and conservation efforts in the region, highlighting the need for environmentally considerate practices. Following a brief stay at Marcelo's apartment, Noah sets off for the northwest of Argentina, uncertain yet hopeful about Freddy's arrival.

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## Meeting Freddy

After a lengthy wait, Freddy finally arrives with friends in a pickup truck. Eager introductions unfold, and the group enthusiastically discusses the upcoming journey into the remote Cerro Negro mountain range, renowned for its exceptional bird species. With plans to trek over ten miles while their gear is transported by mules, the group departs with excitement.

## The Journey Begins

As they embark on their hike, the thrill of discovering new bird species together enhances Noah's experience. They reach the trailhead, where the mules await to carry their supplies. The camaraderie deepens as they exchange scientific names of birds, revealing the varied birding cultures existing across different regions.

## Hiking in a Thunderstorm

The atmosphere shifts dramatically when a thunderstorm descends upon them, soaking the group. Yet, Freddy's enthusiasm remains infectious, and they eventually reach their campsite in a clearing. Dinner becomes a makeshift affair, utilizing their damp food supplies, but the group retains their cheerful spirits despite the unfavorable weather.



## **The Next Morning**

With the dawn following the storm, the landscape unveils breathtaking views and vibrant wildlife. Freddy's local expertise positions them perfectly for birding, far removed from the typical tourist routes. Noah reflects on how vital these connections with local birders are, allowing him to uncover unique sites and species that enrich his birdwatching journey.

## **Conclusion of the Chapter**

As they prepare to explore the expansive Pastizal grasslands in the coming days, Noah values the newfound camaraderie fostered through their shared passion for birding. The group's enthusiasm for seeking out rare species amplifies the joy of discovery and companionship within the natural world, marking a promising start to his adventure.

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# Chapter 4: Over the Years

## Chapter 4 Summary: Over the Years

In this chapter, Noah Strycker delves into the evolution of birdwatching, tracing his personal passion for the natural world back to his childhood fascination with birding books. His early exposure to birding was not merely a hobby but an adventure woven into a historical tapestry of exploration, echoing the journeys of legendary ornithologists like John James Audubon. Audubon's meticulous bird illustrations, crafted during his travels across North America, underscore the deep connection between adventure and the study of birds.

The narrative progresses to the mid-20th century, marking a pivotal shift in the birding community largely fueled by Roger Tory Peterson's groundbreaking work, "A Field Guide to the Birds." This publication democratized birdwatching, moving it away from the confines of traditional ornithology, and offering everyday enthusiasts the tools needed for bird identification.

Strycker continues by spotlighting adventurers like Dean Fisher and Peter Alden, who pushed the boundaries of birding through their extraordinary travels. Alden notably achieved the remarkable feat of observing over 2,000

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species in a single year. This era also saw the birth of the American Birding Association, which fostered a competitive spirit among birders and emphasized record-keeping and listing as central aspects of the birding experience. Figures like Stuart Keith encouraged a global perspective in birdwatching, inspiring a broader audience.

The chapter then paints the 1970s as a golden age for birdwatching—an era characterized by a thriving community that enthusiastically shared knowledge and supported each other in achieving record-setting Big Years. Kenn Kaufman emerged as a significant figure in this landscape, challenging prevailing notions of competition while motivating fellow birders through his achievements.

As we move into the modern era, Strycker examines the transformative impact of technology on birdwatching. The rise of social media and mobile applications has made bird identification and field guides more accessible, particularly appealing to millennials. This technological integration has catalyzed a resurgence of interest in outdoor activities, widening the birding community.

Finally, the chapter highlights a revitalized global interest in birding, driven by record-breaking accomplishments and personal quests such as those of Ruth Miller and Alan Davies. Their journeys not only surpassed prior milestones but also underscored the interconnectedness of the modern



birding world, setting the stage for Strycker's own aspirations as he looks forward to carving his place in this vibrant community.

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# Chapter 5 Summary: The Harpy

## Chapter 5: The Harpy

In late January, Noah Strycker embarked on an exciting birding expedition in northeastern Argentina, specifically in the Misiones province, accompanied by fellow birder Guy Cox. This trip was part of Strycker's ambitious goal to observe 5,000 bird species within the year, known as a "Big Year" in the birdwatching community.

Before his meeting with Guy, Strycker toured the iconic Iguazu Falls, renowned for its stunning size and rich biodiversity. The falls are not only a breathtaking natural wonder but also serve as a habitat for various species, including the striking Great Dusky Swifts, which Strycker eagerly observed.

Strycker and Guy soon ventured into the lesser-known San Sebastian de la Selva forest reserve, recognized for its lush Atlantic Rainforest, a vital ecosystem teeming with unique and endemic bird species. However, this area faces severe threats from deforestation, making their exploration particularly significant as they sought to appreciate and document the rich avifauna before it diminished further.

During their birding adventures, Strycker achieved a notable milestone:

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spotting his 500th bird of the year, the stunning Surucua Trogon. This moment reinvigorated his determination to continue his formidable journey of observing thousands of species.

However, logistical challenges arose as Strycker attempted to navigate the complicated Brazilian visa requirements necessary for a U.S. citizen. The process proved to be time-consuming and costly, but ultimately he successfully secured the needed documentation.

Once in São Paulo, Strycker met local birder Guto Carvalho, who shared insights and introduced him to various birding hotspots. Their visit to Intervalos State Park resulted in an impressive list of bird sightings, a testament to the region's rich biodiversity.

Continuing his exploration, Strycker teamed up with René Santos and traveled to the coastal island of Ilhabela. There, he was thrilled to spot the near-threatened Spot-breasted Antvireo, further enriching his experience and knowledge of Brazil's avian life.

A highlight of Strycker's journey came when he learned of an active Harpy Eagle nest in Serra das Araras. The Harpy Eagle, renowned for being one of the world's most powerful raptors, captivates birders, yet sightings of these majestic birds are rare due to habitat loss and their secretive nature. Intrigued, Strycker decided to detour to investigate.

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At the nest site, patience became crucial as Strycker, guided by local expert Giuliano and his sister Bianca, spent hours waiting for the eagles to appear. The lengthy wait fostered reflection on the virtues of patience and the emotional significance of birdwatching.

Just when they were about to depart, the moment they had eagerly anticipated arrived: a male Harpy Eagle swooped into view, clutching prey in its talons. The sheer magnificence of the bird sent Strycker's excitement soaring, marking a remarkable culmination of hard work and dedication throughout his birding journey.

Strycker recorded his sighting of the Harpy Eagle as entry number 657 in his ongoing list. This achievement, while exhilarating, also served as a poignant reminder of the extensive journey ahead as he pursued his goal of witnessing 5,000 species in the months to come.

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# Chapter 6 Summary: Gunning It

## ### Chapter 6: Gunning

### Altitude and Its Effects

Set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Andes at 16,000 feet, the author learns firsthand about the challenges of high-altitude living. While oxygen levels remain comparable to sea level, diminished atmospheric pressure necessitates greater effort from the heart and lungs. Battling altitude sickness, he reflects on his milestone of spotting 1,000 bird species during his Big Year, even as the stunning Peruvian landscape captivates him.

### Planning for Peru

With a meticulously crafted 21-day itinerary, the author embarks on a journey to Peru—home to nearly 1,900 bird species, many of which are unique to the region. Though landmarks like Machu Picchu beckon tourists, his focus remains on birdwatching, seeking out species that define Peru's remarkable avian diversity.

### Introducing Gunnar

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Central to this adventure is Gunnar Engblom, an esteemed figure in Peru's birding community. Known for his resourcefulness and adventurous spirit, Gunnar's expertise becomes pivotal in navigating the complex terrain and promising the author a thrilling birding experience. His engaging stories and past escapades add depth to the expedition's narrative.

## **First Days in Peru**

The author's adventure truly begins as he teams up with Gunnar, along with companions Carlos and Glenn, to target specific endemic birds in the central highlands. Their path is fraught with challenges, such as navigating perilous roads and battling altitude sickness. Despite these hurdles, the group's perseverance leads to rewarding sightings, including the elusive Black-spectacled Brushfinch.

## **Breaking Down Obstacles**

As they continue their birding itinerary, complications arise in the form of vehicle breakdowns. The group experiences a heartwarming moment when a local resident generously assists by swapping out car batteries. This unexpected kindness highlights the strong sense of community that persists amidst their hardships.

## **Continuing the Journey**

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Determined to reach Huánuco, the urgency of their schedule presses on them, emphasizing the limited time available to explore Peru's diverse ecosystems. The team adeptly navigates travel setbacks while maintaining their ambitious birdwatching agenda, driven by the thrill of discovery.

## **Facing Illness**

After successive days of demanding travel, the author succumbs to illness, manifesting flu-like symptoms that raise concerns about his endurance during the lengthy expedition. This bout of sickness prompts a moment of self-reflection on the need to pace himself throughout his year-long birding quest.

## **Recovery and Birding Excellence**

Once he regains his strength, the author eagerly resumes birding alongside Gunnar, setting their sights on the extraordinary Marvelous Spatuletail. This stunning bird, known for its uniqueness and beauty, symbolizes the tension between the exhaustion he faces and his unyielding passion for birdwatching.

## **Conclusion: The Unpredictability of Peru**

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In retrospective summation, the chapter reveals the myriad challenges the group faced, from mechanical mishaps to health issues. Yet, these struggles are beautifully countered by the breathtaking bird sightings and the warmth of local interactions. The expedition culminates in a remarkable tally of species, underscoring both Peru's rich avian diversity and the resilience of those dedicated to exploring its wonders.

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## Chapter 7 Summary: An Angel of Peace

### Chapter 7: An Angel of Peace

As Noah waits for his flight to Ecuador at Lima's Jorge Chávez International Airport, memories of a conversation with Gunnar about Arjan Dwarshuis—a young Dutch birdwatcher planning a worldwide birding adventure in 2016—flood his mind. Despite feeling a twinge of anxiety about potential competition, Noah resolves to concentrate on his own journey rather than the rivalry, eager to embrace the challenges ahead.

Ecuador is introduced as a premier destination for bird lovers, rich in biodiversity with over 1,700 bird species thriving in its compact geography. This nation stands out not only for its remarkable avian variety but also for its unique constitutional commitment to the "Rights of Nature," emphasizing a deep-rooted respect for environmental conservation. Having visited before, Noah feels a sense of familiarity and comfort as he prepares to reconnect with the lush landscapes that had previously captivated him, contrasting it with the cognitive overload he felt in Peru.

Upon his arrival, Noah partners with local birding expert Manuel Sánchez at the Yanacocha Reserve. Together, they are enchanted by the region's magnificent hummingbirds, including the rare Sword-billed Hummingbird.

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This partnership deepens Noah's understanding of the vital role that local conservationists like Manuel play in promoting sustainable development through birdwatching, showcasing the intimate link between nature and community welfare.

The narrative shifts to Ángel Paz, a legendary figure in the birding community, known for his remarkable ability to attract Giant Antpittas to his property. Ángel's transformation from logger to conservationist is a poignant tale of redemption, illustrating how ecotourism can serve as a powerful force for environmental stewardship. After realizing the potential of his land for birdwatching, Ángel redirected his efforts towards guiding nature enthusiasts, successfully launching a flourishing ecotourism initiative.

Noah's experience culminates during a visit to Ángel's property, where he witnesses the enchanting Giant Antpitta named María being hand-fed worms by Ángel. This magical moment not only marks a pinnacle in Noah's birdwatching journey but also highlights Ángel's unique bond with the birds he nurtures, embodying the spirit of compassion and conservation.

Ángel's success story serves as an inspirational model of grassroots conservation, showcasing how he has transformed his life's path and created sustainable livelihoods through ecotourism that attracts thousands of birdwatchers each year. Noah reflects on the vibrancy of the ecosystem and the richness it has brought not only to Ángel but also to the broader



community as stewards of nature. The chapter concludes with Ángel calling out to María, reinforcing the deep connection between the man and the wilderness he cherishes.

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## Chapter 8: Flying Free

### Flying Free: A Journey of Migration and Connection

As March gives way to April, migratory urges stir among millions of birds flocking from the Neotropics—an area stretching from southern Mexico to northern South America. Hawks, warblers, and orioles embark on their annual journey north, driven by "Zugunruhe," a remarkable instinctive restlessness that compels them to migrate.

The phenomenon of migration has intrigued ornithologists for centuries, with ancient scholars such as Homer and Aristotle documenting these remarkable avian movements. Modern studies have unveiled astounding migration feats, including the non-stop journey of Bar-tailed Godwits from Alaska to New Zealand. Yet, despite progress in tracking technology, the evolutionary origins of migration remain a captivating mystery.

After a fulfilling 103 days of birdwatching in South America, the author felt the magnetic pull of migration. He journeyed northward into Central America, exploring Colombia and Panama and reaching a significant milestone by observing his 2,000th bird species.

Upon entering Costa Rica, the author encountered enthusiastic local birders

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Roy Orozco and Johan Fernández, who tailored a flexible itinerary to showcase the Central American avian diversity. The nation's lush biodiversity and a strong commitment to environmental preservation provided a backdrop for a uniquely enriching birding experience.

One of the highlights was a trip to Cerro de la Muerte in the Talamanca Range, famed for its endemic species. With Roy and Johan, the author encountered various birds, including the striking Resplendent Quetzal—an iconic bird revered in local culture for its dazzling plumage.

However, amidst the thrill of birding adventures, the author received tragic news: his intended guide in Guatemala, Hugo Enríquez, had died in a car accident months earlier. This shocking loss brought profound reflection on the fragility of life and the importance of human connections.

In the wake of Hugo's passing, new pathways opened for the author as he connected with John Cahill, a promising young birder in Guatemala who offered to guide him. This partnership led to remarkable sightings and rich experiences, as the author continued to deepen his appreciation for the natural world alongside the camaraderie of fellow birders.

As time passed, the author faced more heart-wrenching news: Roy had been diagnosed with cancer and would later succumb to the illness. In contrast, Johan celebrated the joy of new beginnings with the arrival of a child. These



contrasting experiences underscored life's cyclical nature, set against the backdrop of flourishing wildlife.

In conclusion, the author's journey through birding is not just a quest for observation but also a poignant exploration of migration, connection, loss, and renewal. Each bird sighted serves as a reminder of the intricate tapestry of life and the enduring relationships forged from a shared passion for nature, illustrating the profound joy found even amid sorrow.

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# Chapter 9 Summary: Home

## Chapter 9: Home

In this chapter, Noah Strycker reflects on his remarkable progress in his quest to observe 5,000 bird species by the end of the year. As he averages 19.5 species per day by May, he begins to embrace the journey itself while making his way north through the rich landscapes of Central America and into Mexico.

His adventure takes a delightful turn in Oaxaca, where he meets Eric Antonio Martínez, a seasoned local birder. Eric introduces Noah not only to a variety of endemic birds native to the region but also to the rich culinary heritage, notably the renowned black mole sauce. Their explorations among ancient historical ruins ignite Noah's passion for birdwatching further, deepening his appreciation for both wildlife and the vibrant culture of Oaxaca.

Transitioning from Oaxaca to northern Mexico, Noah partners with another birder, René Valdés, opting for a road trip that veers away from the typical tourist spots in Mazatlán. They take advantage of a newly constructed highway, which enhances safety and accessibility through a landscape that was once fraught with challenges. Along their journey, they encounter



numerous bird species, enriching their shared experience.

While pausing at the impressive Baluarte Bridge, the duo sights Military Macaws, and as they delve into their search for rarer species, they have a startling encounter with armed men nearby. However, the tension quickly dissipates when it becomes clear that the sounds they heard were merely bursting fruits and not gunfire, adding a layer of thrilling adventure to their birding expedition.

A significant milestone occurs in Durango City when Noah observes the Striped Sparrow, marking his 2,499th species. The excitement crescendos as he spots a nightjar, ultimately confirming it as a Common Poorwill, which becomes his 2,500th species. This moment stands out as an emotional peak of his year-long journey, showcasing both the highs of birding and the deep connection he feels to the world around him.

After spending two days in Texas, Strycker crosses back into the United States, feeling a mix of relief and restlessness. While the comfort of home is welcoming, his yearning for further exploration compels him to arrange additional birdwatching outings with friends, highlighting the duality of belonging and adventure that characterizes his journey.

In a nostalgic homage to his roots, Noah joins his friends, Anne and Dan Heyerly, to explore the Oregon coast, where they seek out coastal birds such

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as the Tufted Puffin. Their shared experiences rekindle fond memories and deepen his understanding of what home signifies, especially in relation to his passion for birds.

As the trio successfully spots a Tufted Puffin, Strycker takes a moment to revel in the culmination of his journey so far and the beauty of familiar surroundings. The chapter concludes with a reaffirmation of his love for his home and a bold commitment to continue his birdwatching adventures, illustrating that the journey of exploration is as enriching as the destination itself.

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# Chapter 10 Summary: Missed Connections

## Chapter 10: Missed Connections

In this chapter, Noah Strycker shares his tumultuous travel experiences across the United States, detailing a series of frustrating delays and cancellations with United Airlines that added a staggering 27 hours to his journey. This setback contrasted sharply with his previous smooth travels in Latin America and left him anxious about jeopardizing his ambitious birding goals for the year, commonly referred to as a "Big Year." Strycker underscores the critical role of time in the world of birdwatching, where every moment counts in the pursuit of rare sightings.

Upon arriving in Ithaca, Strycker meets Tim Lenz, a passionate birder and programmer for eBird, an online platform that tracks bird sightings globally. Together, they embark on a quest to find common bird species in the area. Their expedition takes an exciting turn when they spot a rare Brown Pelican, leading to a classic birder's dilemma: should they chase this rare bird or focus on ticking off a species that Strycker urgently needs for his list? Ultimately, they manage to enjoy both experiences, reflecting the multifaceted nature of birding, where personal priorities can often clash.

While pursuing the Brown Pelican, Strycker contemplates the essence of

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birding. He appreciates the thrill of hunting for rare species while also finding joy in observing more common birds throughout the year. This successful chase of the Pelican illuminates his broader appreciation for global birding experiences, where enthusiasm for common species is just as vital as the thrill of discovering a rarity.

After his time in New York, Strycker continues to Iceland, where he encounters yet another challenge related to missed flights. Nevertheless, he maintains a positive outlook, reaching out to Yann Kolbeinnsson—an enthusiastic local birdwatcher—who graciously agrees to meet him for a late-night birding adventure. They spend hours exploring Iceland's spectacular tundra, delighting in the sights of several bird species, including the iconic Atlantic Puffin, all under the enchanting glow of the summer twilight.

Next, Strycker travels to Europe and seizes the opportunity to connect with renowned birder Peter Kaestner during a layover in Frankfurt. The two enthusiasts set out to locate specific bird species, which leads to engaging discussions on the intricacies of birding lists—a crucial aspect of the birding community. Strycker successfully adds an Egyptian Goose to his tally, providing a sense of fulfillment amidst the chaos of his travel experiences.

In conclusion, despite the numerous obstacles and missed connections he faced during his travels, Strycker highlights the unexpected joys and



camaraderie that come from fellow birders worldwide. This chapter emphasizes his unwavering determination to achieve his ambitious birding goals while embracing the unpredictability inherent in his journey.

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## Chapter 11 Summary: Photos

### Summary of Chapter 11 from "Birding Without Borders" by Noah Strycker

In Chapter 11, Noah Strycker delves into the exhilarating world of birding in some of the most unusual and remote locations across the globe. He begins by reflecting on the essential role of field guides in his year-long birding quest, emphasizing their transformation into accessible digital files that facilitate global exploration. Among the varied locales he visits, Antarctica emerges as a standout, not for its diverse bird species, but for the charismatic Gentoo Penguins that inhabit the icy landscape.

Strycker kicks off his global adventure in Antarctica, stepping away from conventional birding settings. He soon finds himself in Argentina, where he embarks on a mule team journey that leads to the sighting of rare species, notably the striking Aplomado Falcon. These incredible encounters with avian wonders continue as he traverses South America, with significant highlights including the majestic Harpy Eagle in Brazil and the elusive Giant Antpitta, which he observes thanks to the training efforts of a dedicated local farmer in Ecuador.

Nevertheless, the path of an intrepid birder is seldom smooth. Throughout his travels, Strycker faces numerous challenges, such as mechanical

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breakdowns and the harsh realities of extreme weather conditions while birding in Peru. Notably, his experience at Ticlio Pass—a high-altitude location—proves both exhilarating and daunting as he battles altitude sickness.

The humor in Strycker's narrative shines through as he recounts his many inventive modes of transportation, from airplanes to taxis, and even quirky local systems like Colombia's "La Brujita," a unique cart used for traversing difficult terrains. Each mode adds color to his journey, reflecting the diverse cultures and landscapes he encounters.

As he journeys through breathtaking landscapes, Strycker shares memorable birdwatching moments, such as the never-setting sun of Iceland during summer and the vibrant wildlife spectacles found in South Africa's Kruger National Park. His enthusiasm for avian life also extends to highlights on conservation, where he advocates for the protection of endangered species like the Cassowary and the rare Golden Masked-Owl, emphasizing their ecological importance.

The chapter crescendos with significant milestones, including the celebratory sighting of his 5,000th bird species and culminating in his last bird of the year—a bay owl in India. This moment holds special significance, as it may represent the first-ever photograph of a wild bay owl captured in the country.



In conclusion, Chapter 11 encapsulates Strycker's commitment to a diverse array of bird species and highlights the rich tapestry of experiences, challenges, and triumphs he faced during his Big Year, ultimately reinforcing his unwavering passion for birding and the urgent need for wildlife conservation.

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## Chapter 12: Kalu

In Chapter 12 of "Birding Without Borders," titled "Arrival in Ghana," Noah Strycker embarks on an adventurous birdwatching journey in Accra, Ghana, during the wet season. This time of year is often avoided by birders due to the heavy rains and flooding, yet Strycker is undeterred, eager to immerse himself in the coastal rainforest, which boasts a rich array of biodiversity and many endemic bird species. Upon arrival, he meets his local guide, Kalu Afasi, who is passionate about birding and provides a warm welcome.

Strycker is quickly enveloped in the bustling life of Accra, with its vibrant streets filled with lively markets and heavy traffic. Kalu shares insights into Ghanaian culture, particularly the significance of birth days, which are celebrated differently across the country. They also discuss how shifting weather patterns are affecting local ecosystems and biodiversity, setting the stage for their birdwatching adventures.

Their first expedition takes them to the Winneba Plains, where they encounter an assortment of unfamiliar bird species, including the striking Black-bellied Bustard. This initial birdwatching session ignites Strycker's enthusiasm for the diverse avian life in Ghana, as he and Kalu enthusiastically record their findings.

In the evening, over a traditional meal, Kalu opens up about his transition





from an aspiring soccer player to a birdwatching guide. He shares his family's background and the growing culture of birdwatching in Ghana, providing depth to his character and enriching Strycker's understanding of local customs and personal narratives.

The adventure continues in Kakum National Park, known for its breathtaking canopy walkways that offer a unique vantage point of the rainforest. Here, Strycker and Kalu enjoy identifying numerous birds by their calls, highlighting the fascinating flora and fauna that thrives above the forest floor, which many birds prefer to conceal themselves within.

The chapter reaches a highlight as they journey to Mole National Park, where the landscape shifts to savanna, and they encounter their first wild elephants. This remarkable sighting, along with various bird species, enhances Strycker's growing list of "lifers"—a term birders use to describe new species they have seen for the first time.

However, Kalu also brings to light the challenges that can accompany birdwatching in remote areas, recounting a harrowing incident involving Cobby, a local birdwatcher who faced danger. This narrative underscores the complexities and risks associated with exploring less familiar territories, despite the beauty of the avian world.

As the chapter concludes, Strycker reflects on his rich experiences in



Ghana—the vibrant culture, the captivating wildlife, and the complex social dynamics that underscore his encounters. He contemplates the profound intersection of nature and personal beliefs, as well as the broader societal context that shapes his birdwatching journey in Africa.

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# Chapter 13 Summary: The Karamoja Apalis

## Summary of Chapter 13: Birding Without Borders by Noah Strycker

In this chapter, titled "The Nature of Bird Lists," Noah Strycker explores the nuances of birdwatching and the significance of life lists. He argues that the quantity of birds on one's life list does not necessarily reflect one's expertise; instead, true skill comes from a deep understanding of particular regions or species, cultivated through personal experiences rather than mere numerical accumulation. This idea emphasizes that a life list is more than just a tally; it encapsulates an individual's journey, dreams, and unique encounters with nature.

As Strycker recounts his time in Africa, he faces distinct challenges. Navigating unfamiliar birds and the rapid pace of travel presents hurdles, but with the help of local guides, he successfully identifies 318 species in Ghana within just one week, many of which are new to him. This highlights the essential role of community and local knowledge in enhancing the birdwatching experience.

Strycker expresses a preference for grassroots connections over commercial bird tours. While he does engage in some small group tours in South Africa and Tanzania, his primary focus remains on spontaneous interactions with

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local experts that allow for a more immersive experience.

His journey takes him to South Africa's Kruger National Park in mid-July, where he transitions from the challenging conditions he faced in Cameroon to a more relaxed and enriching birdwatching environment. The park offers him exciting opportunities to observe birds alongside Africa's majestic mammals, marking significant milestones in his birding adventure.

The chapter culminates with Strycker's quest for the elusive Karamoja Apalis, a small but strikingly beautiful bird that is rare to find. Locating this species in the remote Serengeti symbolizes a deeper appreciation for the subtleties of birding, celebrating the thrill of discovering less conspicuous species amidst the backdrop of Africa's iconic wildlife.

Ultimately, Strycker reflects on the joy and excitement of birdwatching, underscoring the importance of community, local expertise, and the profound experiences that arise from immersing oneself in nature. His pursuit of birds becomes a pathway to understanding the world around him, revealing the intricate beauty of individual species against the vastness of the landscapes they inhabit.

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## Chapter 14 Summary: A New World Record

In Chapter 14 of "**Birding Without Borders**," Noah Strycker finds his birding expedition taking on a competitive edge due to the emergence of Dutch birder Arjan Dwarshuis, who plans to undertake a world Big Year in 2016 with the goal of surpassing Noah's record. This revelation stirs Noah's motivation as he feels the thrill of competition, propelling him further on his journey.

After an exhilarating stint in Tanzania, where he discovers a remarkable range of bird species, Noah arrives in Uganda, spotting an impressive 517 species, including the coveted Green-breasted Pitta. By the conclusion of his African tour, he has successfully identified over 4,200 unique birds, bringing him tantalizingly close to breaking the previous world record of 4,341 species.

Transitioning to India on September 13, Noah reaches Kerala with renewed vigor and ambition. The region's richly diverse avian life enhances his quest, and he sets his sights on surpassing the world record, now realizing he needs to see 4,342 species to claim the title.

As his Big Year gains notoriety on social media and in the news, the mounting pressure and competitive spirit weigh heavily on him, momentarily shifting his focus from achieving 5,000 species to the

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immediate goal of breaking the world record. Accompanied by local birder Sanu Sasi, Noah ventures into the Thattekad Bird Sanctuary on September 16, hoping to spot the birds that could secure his record-breaking achievement. The sanctuary attracts fellow birders, all eager to witness history in the making.

Despite battling rain and other challenges, Noah ties the previous record with a sighting of the Common Iora. The thrill intensifies as he embarks on an exhilarating quest culminating in the astonishing sighting of the Sri Lanka Frogmouth, which propels him past the existing world record. The air fills with excitement and celebration among his companions, marking a significant milestone in his journey.

Noah's accomplishment resonates deeply within the local birding community and garners substantial media coverage, resulting in a profound sense of gratitude and reflection on his extraordinary journey. As the chapter closes, he contemplates the broader implications of world records in birding, considering both the motivations that drive individuals to pursue them and the joy that such shared experiences in nature bring to the community.



## **Chapter 15 Summary: Hit and Miss**

**Summary of Chapter 15 from "Birding Without Borders" by Noah Strycker**

### **The Approach of Typhoon Lando**

On October 10, meteorologists identified a low-pressure area over Enewetak Atoll, which rapidly intensified into Typhoon Lando. By October 17, Lando had become a super-cyclone, unleashing winds over 150 miles per hour and posing a significant threat to the Philippines, especially Luzon Island. Despite the looming danger, Noah Strycker remained in Taiwan, preparing for his birding expedition to the Philippines.

### **Pursuit of Birding Goals in Taiwan**

Strycker, alongside birding companion Wayne Hsu, spent their last day in Taiwan aiming to achieve Strycker's ambitious goal of spotting 5,000 bird species. With 4,854 species already recorded, their mission focused on identifying several elusive birds, including the rare Styan's Bulbul, while navigating the impending storm.

### **Birding Ramble Across Asia**

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Reflecting on his journey, Strycker recounted his adventures in Myanmar, where he explored remote areas teeming with diverse birdlife. Following this, he undertook an exhilarating road trip through Sichuan, China, guided by bird enthusiast Sid Francis. These experiences enriched his appreciation for Asia's extraordinary avian diversity while contributing significantly to his growing bird count.

### **Encountering a Celebrity Crane**

During his final birdwatching outing in Taiwan, Strycker had the opportunity to see the renowned Siberian Crane, which had enchanted both locals and birders. The crane's remarkable story served as an emblem for conservation efforts, leaving Strycker with a profound sense of purpose regarding the preservation of such species.

### **Flight Amidst Chaos**

As Typhoon Lando bore down on the region, Strycker successfully boarded a flight to Manila, despite the chaos caused by the storm. Upon his arrival, he was warmly welcomed by fellow ornithologist Nicky Icarangal, who had planned an adventurous week of birding across several islands, with a primary goal of seeking the endangered Great Philippine Eagle.

### **Journey into Mindanao**

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Strycker journeyed to Mindanao, lauded for its exceptional biodiversity yet shadowed by concerns over regional safety due to ongoing conflicts. Nicky provided reassurances as they delved into the Eagle's habitat, discussing the efforts put forth to safeguard the area's unique and endemic species.

## **The Quest for the Great Philippine Eagle**

Though their initial efforts to spot the iconic Philippine Eagle were unsuccessful, Strycker remained hopeful, buoyed by the various other birds he encountered along the way. As he approached his goal of 5,000 species, the mixture of excitement and nervousness accompanied his quest.

## **Milestone Achievement**

After a patient wait, Strycker finally spotted the Flame-crowned Flowerpecker, marking it as his 5,000th bird, a significant milestone in his birding journey. This moment transcended previous achievements, as he reflected on the intertwined nature of his travels, the birds he had observed, and the cherished memories created throughout his remarkable adventure.

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# Chapter 16: Birds in Paradise

## Time and the Nature of Experience

As November drew near, Noah Strycker reflected on the swift passage of time during his ambitious Big Year of birding. The early months of his journey, particularly spent in Antarctica, felt drawn out as he immersed himself in the unfamiliar environment. However, as he ventured further into Southeast Asia, the days seemed to speed by, illustrating the curious nature of time perception: new and exhilarating experiences tend to stretch our sense of time, while everyday routines can condense it.

## Discovery of the Golden Masked-Owl

A pivotal moment in Strycker's adventure occurred when Joseph Yenmoro, a local birder, spotted the Golden Masked-Owl on New Britain Island in Papua New Guinea. This rare species had not been seen in the wild for approximately thirty years, and the sighting excited Joseph immensely, although passing tourists failed to grasp its significance. New Britain remains largely uncharted territory for birdwatchers, and the ecology of the Golden Masked-Owl adds to the island's allure, shrouded in mystery.



## **The Environmental Impact of Palm Oil Plantations**

Strycker uses this moment to address the alarming environmental consequences of expanding oil palm plantations in New Britain. These developments have led to mass deforestation, replacing vital tropical forests with agricultural landscapes to meet escalating global palm oil demand. While these plantations harm biodiversity, they paradoxically host various bird species, including some that are endemic to the region, compelling Strycker to hunt for the elusive owl amidst this altered landscape.

## **Birding Experiences Across Southeast Asia**

Leading up to his trip to New Britain, Strycker traversed a rich tapestry of Southeast Asia, where he observed rare birds in their unique habitats. These experiences ranged from encountering the endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Thailand to discovering endemic species in Indonesia. His observations highlighted the stark contrasts between manipulated environments—shaped by human activity—and the untouched beauty of nature.

## **Searching for the Golden Masked-Owl**

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Upon arriving in New Britain, Strycker teamed up with Joseph to search for the Golden Masked-Owl in the adjacent oil palm plantations near a dive resort. They explored this heavily altered habitat, populated by both common and endemic birds. The search for the remarkable owl unfolded a

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# **Chapter 17 Summary: From End to End**

## **Chapter 17 Summary: Christmas in Paynes Find**

### **Introduction to Paynes Find**

Noah Strycker arrives in Paynes Find, a remote town in Australia, just in time for Christmas. This festive season feels strikingly different in this dry and isolated locale where traditional celebrations are overshadowed by the Australian summer. Australians enjoy Christmas festivities with outdoor barbecues and beach activities, celebrating the season in stark contrast to snowy winter traditions elsewhere.

### **Birding with Frank O'Connor**

Joining Strycker for a unique holiday experience is Frank O'Connor, a renowned bird expert. Together, they embark on an adventurous birdwatching mission, aiming to identify 31 new bird species over the next three days. On Christmas morning, they set off early, eager to explore the natural beauty and diverse avian life of the region.

### **Birding Adventures**

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As the day unfolds, despite the rising temperatures, Strycker and O'Connor find joy in spotting a variety of birds including the vibrant Crimson Chat and the colorful Mulga Parrots. Their pursuit transforms the holiday into an exhilarating experience, brimming with the festive spirit of exploration.

## **Goals and Reflections**

Throughout the year, Strycker has been meticulously tracking his birding achievements, coming close to his goal of observing 6,000 species. With only six days left in the year and his current count at 5,966, the pressure mounts. The pair brainstorm strategies to locate more new species as they continue to enjoy their birdwatching journey.

## **Contemplating a Decisive Move**

During their discussions, Strycker ponders the logistics of birding in Australia compared to traveling to other countries like Japan, Ethiopia, Namibia, Guyana, and Cuba for new sightings. Following a heartfelt conversation with his family on Christmas, they inspire him to pursue his passions, even offering to finance his travel to India.

## **Decision to Go to India**

Motivated by his family's support, Strycker decides to travel to Assam,





India, believing it to be the right place to reach his 6,000th bird. After Christmas, he sets off on this new adventure, highlighting the connections and camaraderie that birding fosters among enthusiasts.

## **New Beginnings in India**

Upon his arrival in Assam, Strycker is invigorated by the rich biodiversity that awaits in its lush forests. His objective is clear as he gears up to celebrate the New Year—he is on the cusp of achieving his milestone of discovering the elusive 6,000th species. This journey reaffirms not just his dedication but also the friendships he has cultivated throughout the year.

## **Conclusion and Reflection**

As the New Year approaches, Strycker reflects on the thrill of birding and the bonds formed during his year-long quest. He realizes that the true essence of achieving monumental goals is not merely in the numbers, but in the shared experiences and the joy of nature with fellow birders. With a renewed enthusiasm for new discoveries, Strycker's adventure continues in India, paving the way for exciting new beginnings.

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