Proceedings of the Nova Scotian Institute of Science (2026)
Volume 54, Part 2, pp. 623-633

# BOOK REVIEWS

***The Social Lives of Birds: Flocks, Communes, and Families.*** **Joan E. Strassmann. 2025. Tarcher, New York, USA. 291 pp. ISBN 978-0-593-85306-1.**

Many of us take great joy in watching birds spend time with one another. I am thinking of flocks of chickadees, nuthatches, kinglets, and woodpeckers foraging in woodlands during winter, summer gatherings of hundreds or even thousands of seabirds forming breeding colonies on coastal islands, and mother ducks keeping watchful eyes over their broods.

Strassmann is a leading authority on sociality among eukaryotes. She takes us on a passionate journey to celebrate what we know about the varied social lives of birds. Each of the book's ten chapters opens with a beautiful illustration and focuses on one of the many types of avian sociality, including flocking and roosting, colonial nesting, lekking courtship behaviour, mate choice and parental care, helping others, and communal nesting. By leaning on perspectives of Darwinian evolution, she clearly explains how cooperation and conflict interact in ways that make it advantageous for birds to behave in seemingly counterintuitive ways. These include joining flocks or communal roosts that may be highly conspicuous to predators, breeding in crowded colonies where nesting neighbours can be aggressive, sharing nests with individuals that reject some eggs laid by nesting mates, quarreling with members of their own family, or helping care for young that are not their own.

This book makes complex social behaviours accessible to all of us. The author masterfully synthesizes the vast body of scientific literature into engaging stories of the social lives of Cliff Swallows, Black Vultures, Greater Sage-grouse, Superb Fairywrens, Pinyon Jays, and those of many other species. References to the nearly 300 scholarly works cited are presented in the final section.

The book is also a great tribute to the many scientists and naturalists who have helped reveal social secrets of birds around the world by conducting decades-long population studies of known individuals and by undertaking thoughtful field experiments. Colourful descriptions of study sites are intertwined with accounts from researchers and

Strassmann's own observations from the field, which in my mind contribute significantly to the fascinating stories that she is telling. *The Social Lives of Birds* is a must-read for all animal behaviour enthusiasts. Its subject matter promises to intrigue even the most seasoned observers of bird sociality.

*Shawn R. Craik*
*Département des sciences, Université Sainte-Anne*
*Pointe-de-l'Église, NS B0W 1M0*
*Member of the PNSIS editorial board*
*shawn.craik@usainteanne.ca*