**Bird on Berry Lane by Robert Tougias**

Tougias has condensed his lifelong endeavor of birding into a single year. Thereau did the same when he compressed his two years while residing at Walden Pond into a single year in his magnum opus, Walden. Same as Edward Abbey did with his experiences as a park ranger for two years in Utah compressed into one year in his cult classic, Desert Solitaire. You’ve got that right. I indeed do elevate Birder on Berry Lane onto the same high perch with Walden and with Desert Solitaire. Tougias glorifies suburban backyard birding to the same heroic stature as a yearlong hermitage on a mountainsnap or a monthlong backpacking hike in the wilderness. The little wilderness that is left.

When we read books, three separate time spans coexist at once. First is the month when Tougias was writing, second what month he was writing about, and third what month during which you are reading the book. Ideally, you could savor each monthly chapter by reading it contemporaneous month-by-month with your own month of the year, thereby stretching your reading the book over the course of an entire year. This might provide you with new clues to experiencing the seasons and to seeing each season’s emblematic birdlife. But who of us possesses such patience and persistence? I must confess, not I, who can never eat only half a box of raisins, but must devour the whole dang thing. So rather than taking twelve months to read the book, I read it in twelve days. I can’t say that I couldn’t put the book down. I can say that when I was not reading the book, I often found myself thinking about it. Go ahead, be the birdbrained. For example, the thought-provoking “May” chapter about the seasonal miracle of migration boggled my mind for hours. Many experiments and hypotheses have attempted to unravel migration’s mysteries. Tougias even tossed around some of the theories that have been proven unfounded. About one disproven theory in particular, he concluded, “This theory had many dead ends.” That theories can have dead ends is what is so wonderful for hours about his theory about dead-end theories. A few rare passages did descend into tedium, as when the author observes the weather, an aspect of daily life more appropriate for the here-and-now of a weekly column than for a timeless book. For instance, when he gave an account of his efforts to dig up his car after a blizzard, he lost me somewhere in a snowdrift. But elsewhere, as when he reminisces about his childhood or about his own child’s childhood, those memories deftly serve as seamless transitions into discussions of the birds of the month. His reminiscences are infrequent and are recounted only in relationship to the birds. The subject of the book remains the wondrous lives of birds, not the life of the author. Thus, Birder on Berry Lane is sorely mistitled. Rather, it more appropriately should have been titled, Birdlife on Berry Lane.

To sample the author’s writings, you’ll find a Look Inside on Amazon only for the Kindle, not for the underpriced hardbound book, so make sure you’re viewing the Kindle eBook. You’ll also find on the publisher’s website a downloadable PDF of the same Introduction and Chapter One found on Amazon. For more than just those two chapters, you can Search for the monthly columns that Tougias has contributed since 2015 to Southeastern Connecticut’s daily newspaper, The Day.

But wait! In order to keep you and me on the same page, right here are a few excerpts in their order of appearance, beginning with the first chapter, “January.”

> **“Birds are the visible, audible expressions of the pulse of life that teens all around us. … I see a small piece of the sky revealed through a bluebird. … I count five robins working the lawn. … With each chilly gust, brown leaves dance across the lawn. … The cattail’s tall swayed in nervous curiosity, and its eyes burned bright with impatience. … The second what month he was writing about life, the third what month during which you are reading the book.**

Mark Mathew Braunstein’s previous book reviews have appeared in Natural Health, Animals Agenda, and Vegetarian Times. A nature photographer and author of five books and countless magazine articles, reprints of his articles about wildlife can be found at www.MarkBraunstein.org/wildlife