



Binocular Vision: The Politics of Representation in Birdwatching Field Guides (Critical Perspectives in the History of Environmental Design)

Spencer Schaffner

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From meadows to marshlands, seashores to suburbs, field guides help us identify many of the things we find outdoors: plants, insects, mammals, birds. In these texts, nature is typically represented, both in words and images, as ordered, clean, and untouched by human technology and development. This preoccupation with species identification, however, has produced an increasingly narrow view of nature, a "binocular vision," that separates the study of individual elements from a range of larger, interconnected environmental issues. In this book, Spencer Schaffner reconsiders this approach to nature study by focusing on how birds are presented in field guides.

Starting with popular books from the late nineteenth century and moving ultimately to the electronic guides of the current day, *Binocular Vision* contextualizes birdwatching field guides historically, culturally, and in terms of a wide range of important environmental issues. Schaffner questions the assumptions found in field guides to tease out their ideological workings. He argues that the sanitized world represented in these guides misleads readers by omitting industrial landscapes and so-called nuisance birds, leaving users of the guides disconnected from environmental degradation and its impact on bird populations.

By putting field guides into direct conversation with concerns about species conservation, environmental management, the human alteration of the environment, and the problem of toxic pollution, *Binocular Vision* is a field guide to field guides that takes a novel perspective on how we think about and interact with the world around us.

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