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ONE MORE WARBLER: A LIFE WITH BIRDS.

Victor Emanuel with S. Kirk Walsh. 2017. University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, USA. 273 pages. \$29.95 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-4773-1238-4.

Imagine going on a Victor Emanuel Nature Tour, seated in the van next to Victor Emanuel himself. Between birding stops, this man who has seen over 6,000 species as a world-renowned conservationist and innovator in ecotourism regales you with stories. He starts with his “spark bird”: when he was eight years old, he was taken with the beauty of a pair of Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), and was hooked. Whenever people pile back into the van after a birding stop, he starts another story.

That’s how *One More Warbler: A Life with Birds* reads, as if Emanuel sat down with S. Kirk Walsh a few times, and she transcribed his stories and put them into rough chronological order. His stories are about birds and other people, so you won’t get a lot of insight about him from the book. If you want to learn about Victor Emanuel the man and why he is so beloved, you’d do better to read Katy Vine’s (2011) profile, “The Birdman of Texas,” in *Texas Monthly* magazine.

The book doesn’t have the narrative flow of my favorite birding adventure books: Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher’s (1955) *Wild America*, Kenn Kaufman’s (1997) *Kingbird Highway*, Mark Obmascik’s (2005) *The Big Year*, and Neil Hayward’s (2016) *Lost Among the Birds*, but each of those is about a single year’s adventures rather than a lifetime’s.

I enjoyed many of the anecdotes in *One More Warbler*, though Emanuel flits, like the warblers he loves, from high drama to birding tips without pausing, giving chapters and even paragraphs a breathless, disjointed quality. For example, when he was thirteen, he did a Christmas Bird Count with an older man named Arlie:

“Much earlier in his life, Arlie’s father was a market hunter. He would go out on Trinity Bay and set up a line of guns and kill hundreds of ducks, which would then be sold in the markets. He told us that when he was a very young man, he was riding with a friend and they saw a Native American. His friend raised his gun to kill the man. Arlie’s father pushed the barrel down, and the man escaped. That must’ve been around the late 1800s.

A keen observer, Arlie taught me a lot about identifying birds. For example, I learned from him that the small, delicate Bonaparte’s Gull [*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*]—a species named after Charles Lucien Bonaparte, a leading ornithologist in the 1800s and a nephew of Napoleon—can be picked out by how it sits in the water.” (page 13)

Some of his stories are about notable birding feats, such

as seeing all eight species of Asian cranes on a single journey. My favorite story recounted his 1959 sightings of the now-probably-extinct Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*). Other anecdotes are about notable people he’s known, and his friends comprise a veritable Who’s Who of prominent birders such as Pete Dunne, John Fitzpatrick, Kenn Kaufman, Peter Matthiessen, Ted Parker, Roger Tory Peterson, George Plimpton, and Robert Ridgely. He is often asked about the times he’s birded with George and Laura Bush. Unfortunately, the chapter devoted to them includes more name-dropping than story telling.

Emanuel has a background in political science, yet in the book he hardly notes the environmental movement. He does mention that as a boy, he saw the “vaporous clouds of poison” of DDT sprayings. DDT comes up again only late in the book, when he writes that Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*), abundant during his boyhood, had “virtually disappeared” by the 1960s and notes, “Since DDT was banned in 1972, the Brown Pelican population has rebounded” (page 243). He never mentions Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962), Earth Day, or the Endangered Species Act. He spent a day with Joe Hickey, “one of Roger [Tory Peterson]’s birding buddies when they were teenagers in the Bronx Bird Club” and a wildlife management professor at the University of Wisconsin, but doesn’t note that Hickey was the first person to make the connection between DDT and thinning eggshells. Emanuel’s favorite birds are warblers, yet even when writing about “the rarest North American warbler”, the Kirtland’s Warbler (*Setophaga kirtlandii*), he doesn’t use the word “endangered.” Ecotourism has major environmental implications, good and bad, but in this book there’s no mention of greenhouse gases produced by travel, carbon offset projects, or the value of ecotourism in providing financial incentives to protect tropical forests and other critical habitat.

In 1970, he received a phone call from an Illinois birder hiring him for a daylong birding tour of South Texas—the first time Emanuel realized that he might be able to earn a living by birding. “That phone call changed my life.” The half-century since produced a lot of changes for bird life, for better and for worse. Fifty years after Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher’s adventurous year, recounted in *Wild America* (Peterson and Fisher 1955), Scott Weidensaul (2005) retraced Peterson and Fisher’s steps in *Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent’s Natural Soul*, writing “It’s easy to overlook how far we’ve come in America, where conservation is concerned, unless you take the long view that half a century affords” (page xv). Emanuel has retraced many of his own steps; I wish he had shared his view of the changes he has seen.

Emanuel mentored three teenaged boys starting in the late 1970s, leading to his creating an innovative youth birding camp in Arizona in 1986; the next year he added a camp in Washington. These camps are so widely acclaimed that

I was taken aback when he made an offhand, ungenerous comparison between his camps and birding youth camps provided by such organizations as Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Maryland Ornithological Society. Regional and local programs are more accessible for kids without the means, even with scholarships, to attend a camp that charges over \$2000 and admits only 14 kids per year.

In the epilogue of *One More Warbler*, Emanuel says that his sense of wonder for birds has kept him young. This is a lovely truth that many of us older birders appreciate. His reminiscences fall short of a thoughtful memoir or an insightful glimpse into how the natural world has changed over his lifetime, but flitting along on Victor Emanuel's Memory Lane made for an enjoyable read.—*Laura Erickson, Author and Contributing Editor for BirdWatching Magazine, 4831 Peabody Street, Duluth, Minnesota 55804, USA.*

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