



CONVERSATIONS WITH BIRDS

By Priyanka Kumar

Publication date:
September 2023

ISBN:
9781639550807
Paperback, \$18

Milkweed Editions
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Discussion Questions

1. Priyanka Kumar's work has been compared to Rachel Carson's (in *Psychology Today* and *CRAFT Literary*). One of the things that makes *Conversations with Birds* so unique is how naturalist and author, Kumar, maps her ecological consciousness and braids storytelling from the places she's lived into the ways that birds carry meaning for her. Do you have special "place memories" tied to birds or other animals?
2. In Chapter 2 "A Zen Monk at Work" Kumar embarks on her first formal bird walk and her outlook on the natural world soon undergoes a "seismic shift" [21]. Reflect on the changes she felt moving in the world afterwards and the hurdles she faced trying to bridge the gap between herself and the birds. Have you experienced a similar "seismic shift" in your life?
3. In an emotional moment, Kumar writes, "A feeling of connectedness. That love is all we have." [72] Discuss the communities Kumar encounters in the book, both natural and human.
4. "Neither the land nor the birds yield their stories all at once. You have to come back again and again, and somehow at the right time to be able to put together a picture of the lives of birds." [92] Reflect on this outlook of persistence and patience toward the natural world in the context of the book and your own life.
5. After the birth of her daughter, Kumar's family is visited by a fox, and then a mule deer. She finds comfort in the belief in which Native Americans see animals and their relatives. Where else does Kumar share Indigenous and ancient Eastern teachings alongside her wildlife observations in the book?
6. Kumar's attention to birds leads to gratitude and grace toward each different species. Which bird were you the most moved by? Which bird changed your pre-existing notions?
7. Kumar spends several chapters on the Bald Eagle, documenting the threats to the mighty bird and its low counts in recent years. When in the presence of one, Kumar is starstruck, and grateful for the aliveness the eagle stirs in her. Kumar reflects, "If more souls wandering by a river were to glimpse this extraordinary bird, they might see that the bird is not a symbol of American aggression; it is a sentient being who goes on flying against relentless odds." [211] Discuss this juxtaposition.
8. Birding is one of the most popular hobbies in America, with more books on birds being published every year. What makes *Conversations with Birds* stand apart and how does Kumar's ecological vision inspire you?
9. In addition to her life as a writer, the author is also an acclaimed filmmaker. Where do you see this expertise shine in the book through her writing style?
10. The author's migration of life brought her from the Himalayas of Northern India, to Canada, California, and finally New Mexico in *Conversations with Birds*. Discuss your own migration and who kept you company along the way.

