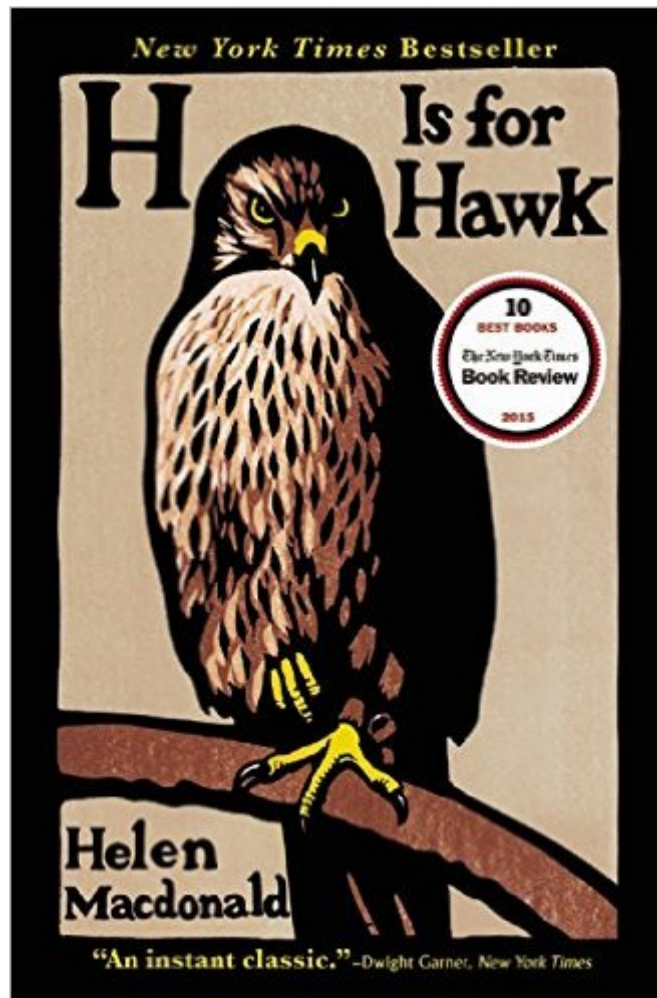


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H Is For Hawk



Synopsis

One of the New York Times Book Review's 10 Best Books of the Year ON MORE THAN 25 BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR LISTS: including TIME (#1 Nonfiction Book), NPR, O, The Oprah Magazine (10 Favorite Books), Vogue (Top 10), Vanity Fair, Washington Post, Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, Seattle Times, San Francisco Chronicle (Top 10), Miami Herald, St. Louis Post Dispatch, Minneapolis Star Tribune (Top 10), Library Journal (Top 10), Publishers Weekly, Kirkus Reviews, Slate, Shelf Awareness, Book Riot, (Top 20) The instant New York Times bestseller and award-winning sensation, Helen Macdonald's story of adopting and raising one of nature's most vicious predators has soared into the hearts of millions of readers worldwide. Fierce and feral, her goshawk Mabel's temperament mirrors Helen's own state of grief after her father's death, and together raptor and human "discover the pain and beauty of being alive" (People). *H Is for Hawk* is a genre-defying debut from one of our most unique and transcendent voices.

Book Information

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Nature Writing & Essays

Customer Reviews

Some of my favourite books have been memoirs of a challenging relationship with an animal - Jane Shilling's *Fox in the Cupboard*, Gavin Maxwell's *otter oeuvre*. *H is for Hawk* belongs alongside them. If that description 'relationship with an animal' sounds fluffy or cosy to you, think again. These animals aren't pets. They are forces to be negotiated with, embodiments of the wild that pitch you into a different way of life and living. You don't invite an otter, a horse or a goshawk to be your friend. You go to their world. You tune into their mind, their instincts, their priorities, their joys, their

fears - and in so doing, you find the places where you are wild yourself. And that wildness doesn't mean uncomplicated freedom. Its values have little in common with human concerns. It is a stripped-away state of being, a universe of survival and struggle, where trust might be life or death. In *H is for Hawk*, Helen Macdonald's journey has added significance. She acquired her goshawk when in the depths of mourning after her father died suddenly. So the hawk is a voyage into a land of death, for not only is her hawk - who she names Mabel - red in tooth and claw, she is a mysterious, highly tuned instrument of death. The only fluffiness in this book is the down on the new-born chicks that are Mabel's staple food. Macdonald does not shy away from this. A lifelong falconer, she defines her world early in the book, banishing any romantic notions of the falconry sport when she writes of a hawk 'murdering a pigeon'. In the same spirit, this book is raw in emotional tone too. As we see what hawks do, we see what grief does.

I almost never read non-fiction; I am not sure I know how to appraise it. But I can recognize good writing. Try this: second page of the book, Macdonald saying that few people will have seen a hawk making a kill | "But maybe you have: maybe you've glanced out of the window and seen there, on the lawn, a bloody great hawk murdering a pigeon, or a blackbird, or a magpie, and it looks the hugest, most impressive piece of wildness you have ever seen, like someone's tipped a snow leopard into your kitchen and you find it eating the cat." Or again, on the next page: "Have you ever watched a deer walking out from cover? They step, stop, and stay, motionless, nose to the air, looking and smelling. A nervous twitch might run down their flanks. And then, reassured that all is safe, they ankle their way out of the brush to graze." Such a simple direct style, almost conversational. And then, out of nowhere, she slips in the extraordinary image of the snow leopard, or the unexpectedly perfect verb, "ankle." Helen Macdonald, naturalist, historian, research fellow at Cambridge, writes in the great tradition of British nature writing, with a keen eye and fine-point pen. I doubt I will see writing this good again this year, whether in fiction or non-fiction. On one level, Macdonald's book is the record of a season spent training a goshawk that she names Mabel. She is no stranger to falconry, having been fascinated by birds since she was a child. As a historian, she has read all the literature on this aristocratic sport. She has trained sparrowhawks and falcons from her late teens. But the goshawk is larger and rarer, with a reputation for being both more dangerous and more temperamental.

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