

Carey

February

The Feather Thief by

Kirk W. Johnson

Characters:



The Feather Thief shines a spotlight on the dark, illegal underbelly of a seemingly innocent hobby: fly-tying. Why do you think fly-tiers are so obsessed with rare bird feathers?

The story of the actual crime is recounted in just a few chapters, but the tension remains high throughout the book. How does Johnson maintain suspense and keep readers hooked? What was the most suspenseful part for you?

Although Rist was eventually caught, he was subsequently released without ever having to spend a night behind bars, thanks in large part to a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome. Do you think his case should have been handled differently? If so, how?

Johnson tells us that bird populations in twenty-six states dropped by nearly half from 1883 to 1898 as a result of a "feather fever" taking over fashion. "Before the Hermès bag or Louboutin heel," Johnson tells us, "the ultimate status indicator was a dead bird" (page 43). Can you draw any parallels with trends today, in fashion or otherwise, that are destructive to our environment?

Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad? What was memorable?

Of the three sections of the book—the story of the theft, the history of Alfred Russell Wallace and the Victorian era's "feather fever," the author's experiences researching this book—which do you find most interesting?

Rating:      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10