Birders of Africa

About this Publication:

‘In this adventurous narrative that explores how relationships between human and birds determined the course of African ornithological knowledge, Jacobs challenges accepted stereotypes and charts a new direction in African history’ – Jane Carruthers, University of South Africa

‘Like the African honeyguide, Nancy Jacobs has led us to great riches. She beautifully describes the fascination of humans for birds, and thereby greatly illuminates (post)-colonial relations between humans’. – Robert Ross, Leiden University.

In this unique and unprecedented study of birding in Africa, historian Nancy Jacobs reconstructs the collaborations between well-known ornithologists and the largely forgotten guides, hunters and taxidermists who worked with them. Drawing on ethnography, scientific publications, private archives and interviews, Jacobs asks: How did white ornithologists both depend on and operate distinctively from African birders? What investment did African birders have in collaborating with ornithologists? By distilling the interactions between European science and African vernacular knowledge, this work offers a fascinating examination of the colonial and postcolonial politics of expertise about nature. It is also a riveting history of the discovery of certain bird species.

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Of Interest and Benefit to:

The general reader interested in the history of birding and birds; academics in the area of the History of Science, Southern African History and African Studies.