

Shmanners 407: Bird Watching

Published May 10th, 2024
[Listen here on Maximum Fun](#)

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello internet, I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette.

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Hello my dove.

Teresa: Hello dear.

Travis: My voice is a little raspy, a little uhhhh, a little 1970s radio DJ.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: Comin' to you live.

Teresa: Cool.

Travis: [in an emphasized gruff voice] "Hey, thanks allergies."

Teresa: Stop. Stop it.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: I'll stop being Wolfman Jack. You know, I'm having some allergy stuff and I talked too much yesterday.

Teresa: Well.

Travis: It's the story of my life.

Teresa: How— How is it possible? I mean I feel like you talk every day of your life.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: A lot.

Travis: So imagine—

Teresa: So imagine. [chuckles]

Travis: — how much too much is. Imagine a level that's more than I normally do. Yeah.

Teresa: Can I tell you that sometimes, when you're like, out on tour and the children are at school, I don't talk to anybody until they get home.

Travis: You just save it up. Save it up.

Teresa: I just don't say anything. I don't know.

Travis: That must be so boring for you, without me around.

Teresa: I mean I don't do it on purpose.

Travis: I feel that way about most people.

Teresa: [chuckles] Mm-hmm.

Travis: Oh, I'm not there—

Teresa: Just—

Travis: — how sad for them.

Teresa: [laughs] It just doesn't happen.

Travis: You just don't talk, okay.

Teresa: Just don't talk.

Travis: And you know, that's a really good time... to watch birds.

Teresa: [laughs] Segueeeeeee.

Travis: Segue. When you're nice and quiet.

Teresa: [sings] He rode a Segway.

Travis: I rode—

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: — and wrote a segue. This is a thing, we— So we have some bird feeders out, we have a big front window and we have some bird feeders out there.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And it kills me, it cracks me up every time that it— You'll be like "Oh, there's a— whatever bird out there", and Dot's like "[shouts] Let me see!", and like comes running over. And of course the bird's like "Woah! I gotta get outta here!". And—

Teresa: Well, during the pandemic, the panini, that's what Dotty and I did.

Travis: But it's just so funny to me how loud Dot will annou— Like she just hasn't got the idea of like "We need to be quiet, it'll upset the birds".

Teresa: As a mere two-month-old, I stood her up on the windowsill, and I said "Look, that's a chickadee. Look, that's a robin. Look, there's a cardinal".

Travis: She will do that thing now that I also really enjoy where she'll start telling us like what sound—

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: — the birds make.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And I think she's right, but I don't know enough to like— So I'm like "Okay, yeah. Sounds right to me". I know that chicken says cluck.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: And owl says hoot, and then she's like "And this is what a bluejay says", and I'm like "Okay". We're talking about— We're talking about... birding.

Teresa: We are, bird watching, birding. Some of my earliest memories of my grandmother are—

Travis: She was a bird.

Teresa: No. [chuckles]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: She was a birder. She had a Audubon book, and she and I would stand at her kitchen window, and she particularly loved cardinals.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: She was very quick to talk about and point out the cardinals.

Travis: She wasn't the— She's not the only one.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: The cardinal is like the state bird of like 34 out of 50 states.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: There's a lot of states.

Teresa: Lot of states.

Travis: 'Cause Ohio's cardinal, West Virginia it's cardinal. Is Kentucky cardinal too?

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: It's just like "Yeah, cardinal, we love cardinals".

Teresa: They're everywhere.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Anyways, that's the episode. Bye everybody.

Teresa: Ha ha ha ha ha ha. So let's talk a little bit about some history. Now first, I would like to give everyone a bit of a heads up. The history of bird watching does not just include watching the birds.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: 'Kay? It— If you don't— If you don't like the idea of hunting, probably skip this part, because that is how people studied birds before then. Okay. So, definition. "Bird watching" is the observing of birds either as a recreational activity or a form of citizen science. And we're gonna talk about what "citizen science" is—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: — 'cause it's neat.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So a bird watcher can observe their animals with the naked eye, or binoculars, or telescope. You can set up even public bird cams, right? You can find those on YouTube.

Basically if you are looking for a bird, you are bird watching. It's a very easy and accessible activity. You— You pretty much just need a spot to stand in or sit in, and your eyes, right? So it's been around for thousands of years. Especially—

Travis: As long as there have been birds and eyes.

Teresa: Yup, especially among the wealthy.

Travis: Well sure.

Teresa: Yeah, 'cause if you had time to watch a bird, 'cause it takes a little while. If you weren't toiling in the fields of the factories, right?

Travis: Well but it also is like a thing you could do... while... doing other things.

Teresa: Hmm.

Travis: Right? So you could be sitting at a picnic and bird watching. You could be incredibly drunk and bird watching.

Teresa: [chuckles] Right, I guess.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: You might be a little unruly for the birds, depending upon—

Travis: I assumed it was a chill drunk.

Teresa: Oh, okay. Okay.

Travis: Yeah, like a champagne— Not a champagne drunk. Maybe more like a... Maybe like a scotch drunk.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: You know, you're sitting there swirling your snifter, and be like "Mm, cardinal".

Teresa: Mm. So, it began by the hunting and collecting of animal specimens. It has been a... a told throughout time obsession of the leisure class, right? And some of the earliest records we have of bird watching is of Egyptian pharaohs fowling in the marshes of the Nile.

And you know, they would also eat birds, right. But they also sold birds and kept birds as pets. They, in ancient Egyptian culture, they were extremely symbolic. Do you remember the sky god?

Travis: That would be— [sighs] Sky god is Horace?

Teresa: That's right, often depicted with the head of a falcon, right?

Travis: Correct. Yes.

Teresa: Or maybe you wore a bird amulet for protection, but the image of the bird was very central to Egyptian life. In fact, it was not unheard of if you had a particularly good relationship with your pet bird for them to be mummified and interred with you.

Travis: I bet the bird hated that.

Teresa: Well, so they could come back to the next life with you. This— The same life. We've talked about this, it's the continuation. Anyway. By the 1700s, hunting and travelling became much, much easier, which led to people beginning to collect and taxidermy their kills.

Travis: Yes. Because what's better than seeing a beautiful thing, then killing a beautiful thing. [chuckles]

Teresa: We'll get to that. So this is where we get to the start of the trophy rooms, right. We've seen these in TVs and movies.

Travis: Well it's maximalism as well, correct?

Teresa: Yes, right.

Travis: Where this— this idea I think it really peaked in like the 1800s, but this idea of like "I need to collect things from every place I go, and make a small pathway through the room to walk".

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And like every shelf, every space, every table covered in stuff.

Teresa: Right. Right. And birds were very common to have. Often taxidermied as if in flight.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? Or like just taking off, or like in very natural looking kind of settings.

Travis: I would like— If— I— I don't have any taxidermied animals in our house, but if I did I would want them all to look very surprised. [chuckles]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Put 'em all like "Huh?! Huh, what?!" That's what I would go for.

Teresa: So these preservations, these specimens were how the ornithologists were able to study, right? So in the 1800s, these ornithologists would use the birds and their parts to examine, to measure, to refer back to during their studies.

You know, if you were studying relationships between different species, right? You wanted to be able to compare and contrast right there without having to wait for it to come across your lawn or whatever.

Travis: You needed specimens.

Teresa: Exactly. And so... It's a pretty lifelike model, right, that could be meticulously studied and then conveniently tucked into your drawer when you're done with it, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: It wasn't until the 19th century, a scientist named Edmund Sellis had an epiphany, while observing a pair of European nightjars in the wild. Picture it.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: He's camouflaged in the woods.

Travis: Okay. Well how can I picture it if he's camouflaged?

Teresa: Well, it's important.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: The camouflage is important. He was attempting to observe the female incubating her eggs. They have a— European nightjars have a very specific pattern on their plumage that allows them to... nearly disappear into the surrounding bark of trees.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And Sellis writes that it took him well over an hour before he quote “finally became convinced that it was the bird, and not a piece of fir bark at which I was looking”.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: So, he was absolutely thrilled to see how flawlessly the nightjar could blend into its surroundings. And this was just from the pattern on its— on its like, wings? right. Using no other kind of like trickery. And... had he only killed the bird and brought it back to his study, he would have never known how perfectly it camouflaged.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Into the bark, right?

Travis: So his epiphany was “Sometimes it— not killing a thing, you can learn more from it”.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: He’s—

Travis: Big epiphany.

Teresa: Big epiphany. He then wrote about how he experienced great regret for all the birds he had killed, or had a hand in killing.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Saying "I must confess that I once belonged to this great poor army of killers, though happily a bad shot, a most fatigable collector, and a poor half-hearted bungler generally. But now—"

Travis: I love all of that hedging by the way.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Of just him being like "But I'm not—"

Teresa: "I wasn't good at it."

Travis: "— I wasn't good at it!"

Teresa: [chuckles] "Now that I have watched birds closely, the killing of them seems to me something monstrous and horrible." So this is when the tide starts to turn, right? Where people are like "Actually..." [chuckles]

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: "Let us not collect them to put in our drawers, but let us observe instead."

Travis: It's such an interesting thing, 'cause like there's two sides to it. Like the Natural History Museum in New York, right.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Has all of these taxidermied animals and all of these examples of these things. And on the one hand—

Teresa: Which originate from usually about the 1800s.

Travis: And on the one hand it's like yeah, during that time, right. These animals would not have been properly cared for in a zoo, right? They would've been put in small cages and this was a way for people to see these animals that they would never have seen in real life, and like we didn't have video documentaries of or whatever.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Travis: And so that's great. But on the other hand, it's like "Oh no man". That— like when Bebe's like "Is that a real animal?", I'm like "Well, it was".

Teresa: It was.

Travis: And she's like "Excuse me?".

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "Go on. What?", and you're like "I don't know how to tell you about this in a way that won't upset you".

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah. It is— It is kind of two sides of the same coin, right? I mean you mentioned that the— the zoos of the time were pretty cruel, and you know, keeping the animal alive probably... wouldn't have elongated its life in any way.

Travis: Well and even then, even in those conditions, it was still incredibly expensive and prohibitive. So it wasn't like "Every city has a zoo!".

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right, so the chance of like a child seeing a lion, right.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Was like a miracle if that happened, you know what I mean? As opposed to pictures in books. So having a taxidermied animal, you didn't need space to take care of and you didn't need to feed 'em or anything, so... I mean, it was a way to see it, I guess. It's just still not great.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Not wild about it.

Teresa: Not wild about it. That's why, and we've talked about taxidermy, if you want to go and listen to that, dear listeners. I don't know which one it is. I'll figure it out.

Travis: Just search "*Shmanners* taxidermy", there can't be that many results.

Teresa: That is why enthusiasts, they maintain that it is important that you collect vintage specimens, right.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So things that have already been catalogued and documented as happening from a long— a long time ago, and we don't do new stuff, except for already dead animals.

Travis: And frankly, if they're taxidermied, especially birds, you don't get to watch them do their funky mating dances that I love.

Teresa: Oh, that's true.

Travis: Oh!

Teresa: You love that, I've seen—

Travis: Hearing David Attenborough talk about this funky dances is, oh, the best part. When I worked at Best Buy and we have the big wall of TVs, you remember?

Teresa: Oh yeah.

Travis: That was on there constantly of just like— And watching this bird spread out its big like tail feathers, and then bounce around to impress the female, and I kept being like "Yeah, me too buddy. Me too".

Teresa: So this is the turning point, right. Edmund Sellis was like "Let's have some empathy for the birds", and that became a more respectable position, and so much so that eventually bird watching became less about conquering the animals and more about protecting them.

Travis: I think that that is a very charitable way of putting it, and not incorrect, but there is also the side of it of you will learn more from watching the behavior, watching it—

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: — move, watching it do its thing, than just looking at like a lifeless taxidermied version of it.

Teresa: Right. This was also helped by the availability of decent binoculars in the early 1900s, which enabled more and more people to be able to observe the birds at a distance, right?

Travis: Yeah, up until then we'd only had unoculars.

Teresa: Mer merrrrr.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: An experience—

Travis: I— I...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That wasn't the response I was expecting, but I guess I should have.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: No no no, it's fine. I'm just trying my best to fill my role over here of the comedy one, but that's fine.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Please, feel free to continue commenting with your whimsical musical instrument sounds.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I don't do that when you drop a fact, and you're like "the use of binoculars", I'm not like "Merrr merrrr". I don't do that. No, it's fine. Please, continue.

Teresa: Sorry.

Travis: No.

Teresa: I'm sorry.

Travis: Baby, don't you apologize— Don't you apologize to me, you keep me on my toes. That's what marriage is. [sighs]

Teresa: They can't all be bangers.

Travis: To— Okay yeah no, keep telling me about how bad my job is. Go on.

Teresa: [through laughter]

Travis: No no no, it's fine. My jokes aren't funny. Unoculars is nothing, I see that now. [sighs] Go on. No, go on. Please.

Teresa: Okay. [sighs]

Travis: It's just that I'm doing my best over here.

Teresa: [chuckles] The early 1940s and the days of the Second World War was when we experienced a big boom.

Travis: In birds. Well, and 'cause there was a big war.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Let me try that again, I'm gonna do the second joke first.

Teresa: [through laughter] Okay.

Travis: There was a big boom 'cause the war. Go on.

Teresa: And during this time—

Travis: I'm trying too hard now, I can feel it.

Teresa: [chuckles] – the book *Watching Birds* by James Fisher hit the shelves, where it quickly exploded in popularity.

Travis: So a war, a boom, exploded. Alex is havin' some fun in there, okay go on.

Teresa: The book would eventually sell over one million copies.

Travis: Now I noticed in here that we have not talked about Audubon.

Teresa: Not yet.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, there are a couple of reasons why this time period is specific with the bird watching. Not only was it accessible, anyone could go outside and try and find some birds, soldiers used bird watching as a welcome distraction during their long watches, and some who were confined to war camps looked to the skies for much needed hope and entertainment.

Travis: I also imagine it was while you were maybe recovering from injury.

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: Or a very calming distraction when returning home from war, which, to put it technically, messed you up.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: To be like "I'm just gonna sit here and look at the sky, and be with my thoughts and my birds", and it was probably very peaceful.

Teresa: I agree. One person who enjoyed this pastime to that end, right, was John Buxton. In his civilian life he had worked with his wife Marjory as the warden of Skokholm Bird Observatory, an island in Wales that serves as a sanctuary, right, for our favorite winged creatures.

Unfortunately, he was captured by the Axis powers in 1940 and spent the rest of World War II bouncing around to various prison camps. Every place he went, he encouraged his fellow inmates to watch and record the behavior of any birds, and at one point he even wrote to Germany's leading ornithologist— ortholog— Hmm.

Travis: Ornithologist?

Teresa: Ornithologist, sorry.

Travis: Yeah. I— That— I said that with a question mark, I'm not sure.

Teresa: No, no you were right. I said it correctly earlier in the episode, but now sometimes after looking at a word so many times...

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It becomes a jumble.

Travis: The leading bird man.

Teresa: Yeah. Asking for books and bird bands, so that he and his fellow inmates could continue their study, even through the imprisonment.

Travis: Bird bands to— Like not like [imitates music]

Teresa: [laughs] No.

Travis: Okay, got it got it got it.

Teresa: For tagging birds.

Travis: The— You know, the leading bird band, The Eagles.

Teresa: And this— [chuckles] The Eagles. Yeah.

Travis: 'Cause it's a bird band, okay.

Teresa: The scientist—

Travis: I'm trying my best. [chuckles]

Teresa: I know, you're doin' great. That was a good one.

Travis: Thank you baby, thank you very much. I'm just wingin' it.

[pause]

Travis: No, nothing?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: This German scientist, Herman Straussman, was so impressed by Buxton's dedication that he did send him supplies. So he was able to continue his work even in— in imprisonment.

John Buxton remained dedicated to his love of birds, and after he was released, he wrote a book called *The Red Start* in 1950, and it was later said that bird watching was one of the few pleasures that helped him and his men continue during their time in the prison camps. But the war did end, eventually.

Travis: Oh good. Okay. Spoilers.

Teresa: No, no no, no spoilers.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: It ended. And so when people came home, like you said, they really still enjoyed bird watching, it was a calming, peaceful activity. But... people seemed to have been divided into two thoughts on the situation.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: If you were a civilian bird lover, you were either quote "a purposeful bird watcher", or a quote "aimless bird watcher".

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So you were either very scientifically surveying and studying the animals in their natural habitat, or you were someone who just liked to look at pretty things and write down the names of the birds you saw.

Travis: There's nothing wrong with that.

Teresa: Agreed. The divide was pretty inevitable at a point, right?
And so—

Travis: Is this where we're getting into the citi— citizen scientists?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: People—

Travis: I'm so excited to talk about that, but first.

Teresa: But— Oh!

Travis: How about a word from another MaxFun show?

[transition theme music plays]

[instrumental music plays]

Speaker One: *Sound Heap with John Luke Roberts* is a real podcast, made up of fake podcasts like *If You Had A Cupboard In Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep In It?*

Speaker Two: So I'm gonna say mugs.

Speaker Three: A little yoghurt and a spoon.

Speaker Four: A small handkerchief that was given to me by my grandmother on her deathbed.

Speaker Five: Maybe some spare honey?

Speaker Six: I'd keep batteries in it. I'd pretend to be a toy.

Speaker Seven: If I had a cupboard in my lower back, I'd probably fill it with spines.

Speaker One: *If You Had A Cupboard In Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep In It* doesn't exist. We made it up for *Sound Heap with John Luke Roberts*, an award-winning comedy podcast from MaximumFun, made up of hundreds of stupid podcasts. Listen and subscribe to *Sound Heap with John Luke Roberts*, now.

[pause]

Dave Holmes: Oh my gosh hi, it's me Dave Holmes, host of the pop culture game show *Troubled Waters*. On *Troubled Waters* we play a whole host of games, like one where I just describe a show using a limerick, and our guests have to figure out what it is. Let's do one right now. What show am I talking about? This podcast has game after game, and brilliant guests who complain. The host is name Dave, it could be your fave, so try it; life won't be the same.

Speaker Eight: Uh, *Big Business*, starring Bette Midler and Lily Tomlin.

Dave Holmes: Close. But no.

Speaker Nine: Oh, is it *Troubled Waters*? The pop culture quiz show with all your favorite comedians?

Dave Holmes: Yes!

[correct answer sound effect plays]

Dave Holmes: *Troubled Waters* is the answer.

Speaker Eight: To this question, and all of my life's problems.

Dave Holmes: Now, legally, we actually can't guarantee that. But you can find it on maximumfun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[pause]

Travis: Okay, tell me about citizen scientists.

Teresa: It was decided by the scientific community that it was impossible to expect every birder to be a citizen scientist. People like to look at beautiful birds, and that's okay.

Travis: That's true.

Teresa: As long as they remain—

Travis: I also like ugly birds.

Teresa: — respectful. [chuckles]

Travis: I don't wanna— I don't— I like a grackle. But I— I think a grackle's not ugly, it's just a fun word to say. Grackle.

Teresa: Grackle.

Travis: Grackle.

Teresa: This didn't stop the beef though, right, between the two sides. Professional...

Travis: I bet birders love beef.

Teresa: Ahhhhh. Suet. There's bird— Bird's love suet.

Travis: That's not beef.

Teresa: It is.

Travis: Suet?

Teresa: Suet.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Suet is—

Travis: We've said the word too many times.

Teresa: Um... It is the layer of... fat.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And connective tissue surrounding the pan— pancreas?

Travis: I don't know.

Teresa: I think. Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Reverend Peter Hartley, a self-proclaimed useful bird watcher, declared that non-scientific bird watching is simply lazy, incompetent, and slovenly bird watching.

Travis: Oh boy.

Teresa: [chuckles] And amateur bird lover, Dennis Summersmith, refused to let that stand.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Responding that casual bird casual bird watching is quote "no more slovenly than going to a concert without a score. Many are not suited to carry out scientific studies or read scores. Should we criticize them for the pleasure they get from birds, or music?".

Travis: I just wanna say, I really love making the counterargument "You can't say that 'cause I'm too stupid to do the thing you do".

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "So there." It's like, hey, uh, come here. I don't think... you're winning this argument the way you think you are.

Teresa: I think that the point was not that he was too stupid to do the thing.

Travis: But when he's like—

Teresa: But that—

Travis: — “Well, some people aren’t suited to do science, so back off!”.

Teresa: Would you begrudge someone enjoying music, even if they could not read music.

Travis: I would— I would argue that—

Teresa: The same way that you would begrudge someone enjoying bird watching, even if they don’t study it scientifically.

Travis: I would say, and this is my own personal opinion, but in many ways knowing too much about a subject is a way to like, remove, partially your ability to enjoy it in a certain way. I think that, for example, like Brent and I have talked about this many times where— when it comes to like musicals.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: He, as someone who like has written musicals, right. He enjoys them differently than I do, where he sees it a lot more, you know, as— as like a constructed thing, the way it’s built. And I’m just like “I thought it was good”.

And so I can see where... you would be like “Well I like knowing about the birds and that helps me enjoy it more”, and I’d be like “That sounds really boring, look at those feathers. [chuckles]

Teresa: Regardless, it didn’t— it wasn’t really ever about that, was it? ‘Cause it was about class.

Travis: Ohhhh, sure.

Teresa: It was about class distinctions. You know, the wealthy could afford the leisure to enjoy bird watching, right?

Travis: Well, and this is another thing too that we see, especially as it becomes— There’s more leisure, right? That’s another thing post-World War II.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Is we start to develop the middle class, and there's a lot more leisure time and vacation time and everything. So once you, ugh, remove the class barrier for bird watching, now it becomes about education.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And it becomes about scientific ability to be like "Okay, yeah, he does it, but he's not doing it the right way—"

Teresa: Right.

Travis: "— because he hasn't been educated in it, so there."

Teresa: Exactly. By the 1960s, expansion in higher education, just like you said, brought more women into scientific spaces, allowing women to take up biology and zoology. The 70s and 80s brought people falling in love with birds that, you know, finally these— let's—

Travis: Well not falling in love with birds.

Teresa: [chuckles] No.

Travis: This isn't like *Crane Wife*.

Teresa: No no no. Falling in love with watching birds.

Travis: The idea of birds.

Teresa: It forced rich white guys to take a back seat, right? 'Cause they could no longer ignore the fact that bird watching was something that even— even those who they'd deemed less... could enjoy.

Travis: I love— Just that sentence made me picture just like a revolution. This is the revolution, we can all look at birds now. [chuckles]

Teresa: Yes. Today, bird watchers come from every background, country, race, religion, and other demographic group you can think of. Millions worldwide are interested in birds and define themselves as bird watchers.

Some take data for larger scientific-run birding, like conservation initiatives.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And some people just enjoy the magic of watching the feeder in their front yards. That would be me.

Travis: Yeah, we have several of those. We call it “Bird TV”.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And we have like five bird feeders set up, so we can change channels on Bird TV.

Teresa: One of them is a hummingbird feeder.

Travis: Yeah, that’s rare, but always very exciting when that happens.

Teresa: One year we had two hummingbird feeders, and the birds started fighting over it.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Them, so we had— we figured out, through the internet, that I had to place them at opposite ends of the bird feeder TV so that the birds wouldn’t fight.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So we didn’t talk about Audubon’s very expensive and incorrect book.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: Here’s a little thing about Audubon’s book.

Teresa: Okay, okay, sorry.

Travis: So, it's very expensive.

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: And I know of at least one example— This is just off the top of my head, I'm not looking at this, but I know that there's at least one, maybe multiple, birds in that book where it's like "That bird doesn't exist". And it was just like a fanciful drawing he did, and he was like "I think this bird's real".

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And... Yeah, so I think for a long time that was like people's like in of like, "Look at all these birds", and once again, very much like we were talking about before, if you lived across— You know, if you're in Europe, right?

And he's over in America, cataloging birds, you're never gonna see those birds. Right? So you would look at the pictures, and that was like your way of experiencing those birds. But it was also really hard to fact check those birds.

Teresa: Mmm, yeah.

Travis: 'Cause you couldn't be like "Alright, show me a photograph of this bird", like that didn't exist. So there you go.

Teresa: Oh, interesting.

Travis: Anyways, it's a very, very expensive book. [chuckles] Even today, very expensive book.

Teresa: Here's some etiquette and some... how tos.

Travis: Don't grab the birds.

Teresa: Don't.

Travis: They hate— They hate it.

Teresa: They hate that. So pick a spot and get comfy.

Travis: Preferably outside. It's a lot easier to find birds— Unless you're like at a Pet Smart or a Home Depot.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: There's always birds in there. I did— When I worked at Pet Smart, we just accepted, you know, through the loading bay doors and the warehouse or like through the front doors.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: There's just gonna be birds.

Teresa: There's gonna be birds.

Travis: And so like it was about like— 'Cause we have big barrels of bird seed or whatever, and imagine you're a bird and be like "Hey guys. Have I got a scoop for you".

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: "There's this place and every day they leave at like 8pm, and then it's just all the bird seed." And so we would just come in in the morning, and you would just find bird seed bags just like pecked open, and you're like "[sighs] You guys".

Teresa: Yeah, "You guys". So this could be maybe at a State Park, right? In— Or as close as your own front window, right. But you should do a little bit of research before you go birding.

Whether that's having a little guidebook, or talking to the park ranger about what kind of birds you can expect in your area. Having at least a vague idea of what you're looking for will help a lot, because you know, making identifications and pointing out to other people is part of like, the fun of it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: There are apps that you can download, Merlin or the Audubon Guide.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: To make— [chuckles]

Travis: I'm sure it's better now. People from the Audubon Society, if you're listening now.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm sure you've gotten a lot more accurate since the original Audubon dude drew his book in the year [mutters incomprehensibly], so.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm sure it's a lot more accurate now, please don't get mad at me. I— Don't send your falcons, or whatever I assume that you have.

Teresa: [chuckles] Whatever it is. You should wear neutral clothing, especially if you're outside, right? You might be a little more protected from like, if you're behind a window of in your backyard, right? Whether they're— they're used to it.

Travis: You have rules in there of how to befriend a crow? 'Cause it's all I want.

Teresa: No, I don't have rules about how to befriend your crow.

Travis: [sighs heavily] Agh.

Teresa: Sorry.

Travis: Teresa.

Teresa: Um—

Travis: Wah wah. [chuckles]

Teresa: Earth tones, right? You don't have to like, wear camouflage or anything.

Travis: Unless you want to.

Teresa: Unless you want to.

Travis: If you want to get out there in a ghillie suit and get real close to the birds, I support it.

Teresa: But perhaps—

Travis: Just don't be a creep about it.

Teresa: Perhaps leave your bright colors and color blocking sets and things for another day.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Be as quiet as possible, because, believe it or not, humans are natural predators to birds.

Travis: [gasps quietly]

Teresa: So, they're not gonna land on your shoulder like Snow White.

Travis: We were talkin' about this on this week's *My Brother, My Brother And Me*, about like setting up bird feeders and how do you get birds to show up. And I said like it's— it's not everything it's cracked up to be. I don't know if you've ever experienced this when you go to feed— like fill the bird feeders in front of our house.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: And you can hear all the birds in the trees around like "Guys, guys! Guys, they're fillin' it up. They're fillin' up, guys. Get ready", and it's literally like [imitates a cacophony of bird song] like throughout the trees, and you're like "Okay".

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: "I gotta get out of here."

Teresa: They are watching.

Travis: And occasionally I will get swooped.

Teresa: They are ready.

Travis: I'll get swooped.

Teresa: Oh yeah.

Travis: [sighs]

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But then if I don't fill it, we get knocks on the door and they're like "Hey".

Teresa: [sighs]

Travis: "If you could come fill that up please, that would be great." We do have a wreath on our front door, and like a frosted glass thing.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: And the birds try to pull stuff out of the wreath.

Teresa: The— The sticks and the twigs. [giggles]

Travis: And it— I just can't imagine how frustrating that must be as a bird to be like "What is going— I found perfect— This stuff is great. Why does it taste weird, and I can't move it? This sucks".

Teresa: So also try and be quiet, because that will help keep the birds at ease. And observe from a respectful distance.

Travis: That's what binoculars are for.

Teresa: That's what binoculars...

Travis: Or unoculars, if you prefer.

Teresa: Are for.

Travis: Trinoculars?

Teresa: [clears throat]

Travis: If you're with a friend.

Teresa: Um—

Travis: I guess you would need quadnoculars at that point.

Teresa: Not only— Not only will it keep you from seeing birds, if you are too—

Travis: Ah, two sets of binoculars would be way better.

Teresa: — too close, but also it could stress the bird out. Which is something that I worry about. There's a robin nest right outside our back door, and every time we go in and out that back door, that robin flies away, and I'm worried about that robin.

Travis: Yeah listen. They knew... that we were there.

Teresa: That's true.

Travis: Right? We didn't move in to their— We didn't build our house next to theirs.

Teresa: I guess—

Travis: You know what I mean?

Teresa: I guess you're right.

Travis: [sighs] That's like if I bought a house that was six inches from a train track.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: And I was like "Why did they put that train track there?"

Teresa: [chuckles] Okay. Some people... using their apps or whatnot, like to play recordings of the birds.

Travis: I know from *Bob's Burgers* that that's not cool.

Teresa: It's not cool that you play them out in the field. You could play them in your home, to get familiar.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Or through your headphones, if you're out in the— in the field, right.

Travis: Is it about tricking birds? Is it a— What is it?

Teresa: So, fake bird calls can confuse the native birds, and it might have a negative effect on birds overall, like just the— the confusion. If like say for example, you... play a recording of a mating call.

Travis: Mm.

Teresa: Right? To draw a bird to you. When the bird gets there and there's no— there's no one to mate with.

Travis: They're gonna be upset.

Teresa: It's confusing for them.

Travis: Yeah. Also don't feed birds bread.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's not good.

Teresa: It's not good for them.

Travis: Feed them the seed. You can go... Even if it's just like a hardware store or whatever, but you can find different mixes of seeds that will cater to different birds. But don't do like rice, don't do bread.

Teresa: That would be considered littering. Do not do that. No rice, no bread. I have heard that you can scatter peas.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And that— Because that is a vegetable, right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: A small thing the birds can eat.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Especially for like ducks and geese. Peas are great.

Travis: They're gonna scurry too.

Teresa: Ha. Peas are great because they also float.

Travis: Okay. Peas, what can't they do?

Teresa: What can't they do? Do not trespass, my friends. I know you wanna see those birds. Do not trespass.

Travis: I thought you were gonna say "I know you wanna trespass".

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "It seems so cool."

Teresa: If you see it—

Travis: "If your friends try to get you to trespass, they're not your friends."

Teresa: If you see a rare or endangered species, that's amazing.

Travis: Eat it, quickly, for its power!

Teresa: [chuckles] But be extremely respectful.

Travis: Oh right.

Teresa: Take a picture, right. Picture's worth a thousand words. Take a picture. But you know... Share the love. And— And make sure that you don't disrespect the bird.

Travis: Don't scare the bird away with your excited whoops and hollers.

Teresa: Indeed. Here's the thing. We're all in this together, right?

Travis: Birding? Or the world?

Teresa: Both.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: If you're—

Travis: Bird world.

Teresa: If you're an experienced birder, help out the newbies, be respectful, but not overbearing.

Travis: Point out birds—

Teresa: And if—

Travis: — and say "That's a bird".

Teresa: That's right. If you're a newbie, you know, ask a pro for some advice.

Travis: And be chill. Act like you've been there before, you know what I mean?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Don't show up and point at everything and go "Is that a bird? Is that a bird? Is that a bird?", and they're like "That's a chair, stop it".

Teresa: [chuckles] Grab your binoculars, make some friends, and have a wonderful time searching for a whippoorwill, or whatever.

Travis: Or a bird. A grackle.

Teresa: Grackle.

Travis: "Is that a grackle? Is that a grackle? Is that a grackle?"
"Stop saying grackle."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Hey, thank you all so much. Thank you to our researcher Alex, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to our editor Rachel, without whom we could not make this show, and thank you for you for listening. You're like a rare bird, and I hope we didn't disturb you.
[chuckles]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I think I'm gonna start doing that, I'm gonna have a great little line at the end. Every one of 'em's gonna be a banger.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Teresa: Every— A called shot, called shot. Go check out— It's a new month which means new merch over at mcelroymerch.com. We've got some *My Brother*, *My Brother and Me* and *Adventure Zones* coming up. We're gonna be in Vancouver and— and Tacoma next week.

I think Vancouver's sold out, but there's still some Tacoma tickets left. And we're gonna be lots of other places, you can find that at bit.ly/mcelroytours. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "Brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found.

Also thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmanners Fanners*. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

Also we are always taking your topic submissions, your questions, your queries, your idioms. So you can send those to shmannerstcast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alex, because she reads every one.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Manners shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

[ukulele chord]

MaximumFun

A worker-owned network

Of artist-owned shows

Supported

Directly

By you