



The Book of Flaco: The World's Most Famous Bird

David Gessner

Blair (Feb 11, 2025)

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David Gessner's engaging nature book *The Book of Flaco* is about an escaped owl and humanity's impact on wild animals.

Flaco, a Eurasian eagle-owl, lived in Central Park Zoo for thirteen years. In February 2023, people with steel-cutting tools released him. Through social media, news of the owl's yearlong "odyssey" spread among birders and locals—one shared updates via Manhattan Bird Alert; another delighted in Flaco landing on her thirteenth-floor window ledge—before going viral. Later, though rumors circulated that he had collided with a building, it was learned that Flaco had consumed diseased pigeons and poisoned rats, leading to his death. But Flaco left a legacy: New York City banned rodenticides.

To imagine Flaco's experiences of freedom, the book draws from bird biology and behavior to explore the issues surrounding Flaco's life and death with nuance. And accounts about previous unexpected visitors to Central Park, including coyotes, widen the book's view of human-wildlife interactions. Elsewhere, Gessner charts his growing love of birds, discussing his encounters with snowy owls on Cape Cod.

Issuing a subtle challenge to reappraise human effects on wildlife, *The Book of Flaco* is a touching tribute to a bird mourned worldwide.

REBECCA FOSTER (January / February 2025)

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