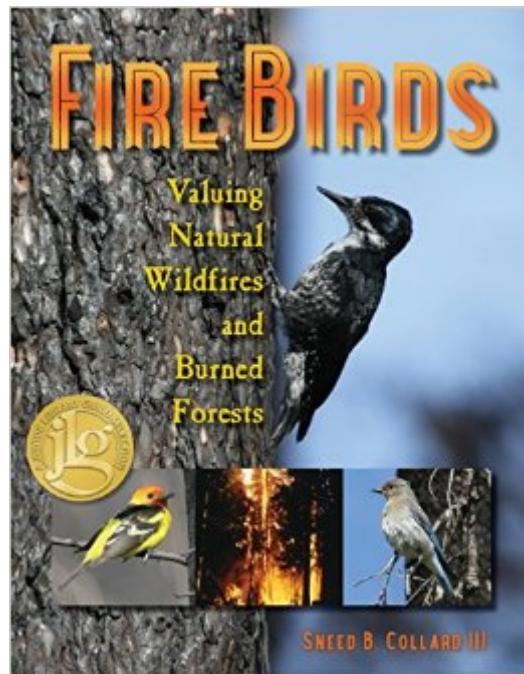


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# Fire Birds



## Synopsis

In *Fire Birds Valuing Natural Wildfires and Burned Forests*, award-winning science author Sneed B. Collard III challenges society's negative views toward natural forest fires. By focusing on the research of biologist Richard Hutto, Collard reveals the complex relationships between fire and thriving plant and animal communities. The book especially focuses on the heavy use of burned forests by dozens of bird species and debunks the idea that burned forests are worthless wastelands. Besides delivering a powerful environmental message, *Fire Birds* couldn't be more timely. With record numbers of acres burning every year, pressure to suppress wildfires and salvage log burned forests has never been greater. Stunning photographs and clear text deliver the message that recent fire policies have been backfiring badly.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (8 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 8 - 11 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

I'm a birder so love it when I find a great book that deals with a lesser known part of the birding world. We've all been taught that wildfires are bad but as Collard points out, natural wildfires (those not set by pyromaniacs or careless people) are actually essential for many species of birds. Birds not often seen elsewhere are abundant in burned out forests. The photographs are magnificent and the text explores some of the species that thrive in this environment. From a "girl power" standpoint I also

appreciated that biologist, Dr. Vicki Saab, talks about her work in wildfire management. It was great to have a female role model. This is a great book for teachers working with STEAM topics and for anyone interested in wildlife. Another point: although the book is intended for young people, it is very informative for any birder!

In *Fire Birds: Valuing Natural Wildfires and Burned Forests*, Sneed B. Collard III not only teaches us about the many species of birds who need burned areas to survive, but through engaging text and straightforward talk, he challenges us to think about our world in new ways. When I first received *Fire Birds* I was immediately drawn to the exquisite photographs. Close ups of Mountain Bluebirds, a Three-Toed Woodpecker and other bird species stood out in contrast to burning forests and blackened tree trunks. But I think it was the introduction, titled “Inferno!” that really pulled me in. Engaging the reader by writing in the present tense and with the use of strong verbs, Sneed takes us right to a forest in Montana. The writing is so powerful I had to read it more than once. In three short paragraphs we experience a natural wildfire from beginning to end. I am always on the lookout for engaging nonfiction text that will not only challenge readers but that will also provide good models for our young nonfiction writers. *Fire Birds* contains many features of nonfiction that can be used as models with students including a powerful introduction, a table of contents, glossary, text boxes featuring different birds, and interesting headings. Each chapter ends with a question or a statement that makes the reader want to continue. *Fire Birds* is a perfect example of nonfiction writing with voice that will inform, entertain, and challenge our thinking.

Well illustrated with photographs, this large format (10"x12") book discusses how forests can become good habitats for a variety of birds after they have been burned, and how the managing of burned forests has some topics of dispute. Working closely with scientist Dick Hutto, Collard describes what features of a burned forest are helpful to birds, and how leaving these burned forests is good for the environment, since forests can become filled with dead plant matter. Acknowledging that companies often come in after fires to reclaim wood because it is financially expedient, the point is made that stripping the land of burned material can lead to erosion and the introduction of invasive plants. This is a good length for a nonfiction book, and very readable. The pictures, taken by Collard, are beautiful and also illustrate the information being covered. I can see my students picking this up readily and getting a lot of good information out of it, but also reading it for enjoyment, which can be hard to find in a nonfiction book.

This book has a lot of potential in the 3-5th grade classroom and even in middle school as a writing mentor for argument writing. It can be used as a mentor text for writing non-narrative nonfiction as well as opinion/argument writing. The author makes a clear case that while the media and many may think burnt forests are a bad thing, these forests are critical habitats, home to many kinds of birds. Towards the end of the book, Collard addresses different viewpoints - those who believe letting forests burn is a bad thing, those who believe logging burnt forests is okay and so forth. This is something we want students to do in their own writing and close reading of excerpts from Collard's text to analyze his craft might be helpful to students. The content is fresh, too. I knew that burnt forests were an opportunity for new growth, but I had no idea that many birds prefer this habitat to healthy forests. Worthy of reading for many purposes.

For years Smokey the Bear warned people about the problems associated with forest fires. But what if Smokey's message was not quite correct? Collard researches the truth by interviewing scientists on how fires in wild areas are actually healthy happenings. Burned forests are the only home for many bird species, like the Black-backed Woodpecker. When natural forest fires are suppressed or burned areas are unwisely logged, these birds lose their homes, food, and protection. But birds are not the only species benefiting from a burned forest: certain shrubs only sprout after a fire, the fire's ash fertilizes the ground, and smaller trees gain more sunshine when dead trees are burned away. Today, these positive findings are finally gaining national attention. *Fire Birds* is an insightful resource to spread the word about healthy forest fires. Collard defines the two fire types: one that can threaten people which must be suppressed, and the other in wild forests that need fire to progress. Collard's beautifully detailed photographs promote his message and highlight the birds and plants benefitting from a burned forest. The chapters are short, easy to understand, and wonderfully narrative. The book has a glossary in the back to help young readers with unfamiliar terms related to this subject. Collard also challenges readers to visit burned forests to see all the animals and plants living in their new environment. A great non-fiction read for ages 8 and up.

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