



# On the Wing: To the Edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon

*Alan Tennant*

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## **On the Wing: To the Edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon** Alan Tennant

In this extraordinary journey, Alan Tennant recounts his attempt to track the transcontinental migration of the majestic peregrine falcon — an investigation no one before him had ever taken to such lengths. From the windswept flats of the Texas barrier islands to the Arctic and then south again into the Caribbean, **On the Wing** provides a hilariously picaresque and bumpy flight.

## **On the Wing: To the Edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon Details**

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Author : Alan Tennant

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## **From Reader Review On the Wing: To the Edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon for online ebook**

### **Christine says**

A vaguely interesting read about animals, and one peregrine's migration journey. The most interesting thing about it, was that it allowed me to think about how much a migratory route depends on stored memory of landscape- which we are rapidly changing. This helps to explain the increase in extinction rates in birds more than other animals.

Other than that, I wasn't very impressed. Nothing about it really drew me in, and I found my mind wandering at certain times while reading it. Some parts probably could have been cut that were boring and not really useful to the narrative.

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### **John Gaudet says**

In some cases there are no obvious economic reasons for the conservation of a species, but an author such as Alan Tennant, in his book, the national bestseller, *On The Wing (or, To The Edge Of The Earth With The Peregrine Falcon*, Anchor Books, Random House, 2005), does such a thorough job of describing the tenacity and beautifully wild nature of the creature, it is impossible to walk away and see the peregrine falcon pass into oblivion. In Tennant's book the species is the subject of a quest told in the form of a passionate, humorous epic with many interesting and informative digressions. His book convinces mankind to work to save a bird that has captured the minds and hearts of millions throughout the course of history.

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### **John Geary says**

Hard to believe there is a book about birds that I read and felt, "Meh" about. But this is one.

I had a really hard time even getting into the book. It took me three separate attempts to get through it. (After the second failed attempt, I actually placed it in a box to donate, but then removed it.)

What prompted me to finally finish it this time was a reading challenge I'm involved in (read 12 books about birds or birding in 12 months.)

It just didn't grab me. (Obviously). There were parts I enjoyed - like the section on their adventures in Belize, because I would have been there not much before the author and his pilot buddy visited there. I also enjoyed the section where he's in Alaska, camping and birding.

Some of the author's observations during his pursuit of falcons did reiterate to me how badly we trash the environment.

However, there were long stretches of the book in which I felt just bored.

I probably would only have given it a rating of 2.5, if half-stars were permitted. But it had to be 2 or 3, so 3 it was.

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### **Clare O'Beara says**

This memoir features flying, falcons, geography and a look at human-caused destruction of nature.

During the 1980s Alan was studying falcons. They had been known as flying from Alaska to winter in Texas, but nobody knew where. Creatures of trees and cliffs, they seemed to vanish in Texas. Then one tracker thought of going out on a vast tidal flat, more marsh than sand, and there were the peregrines - females - and tiercels - smaller males - busily catching migrating shore birds which were tired and had no cover. Alan managed to catch and radio tag a few, and enlisted a crusty veteran pilot George Vose, to help Alan follow them north with his battered small plane.

The first falcon takes us north across the mountain ridges to Canada - oops, international airspace - and Alaska. Alan tries to explain his fascination and lengthy absence to his girlfriend. Then the second season begins, in which Alan and Vose follow a falcon or three south for winter across the rainforest of Mexico, Central America, Belize. Oops, international airspace.

As well as marvelling at the masters of the air and their prey, and finding welcomes among simply living people or dangers from drug growers, Alan imparts the knowledge of his field. DDT was found to be passing up the food chain through insects to small birds and accumulating in falcons so their eggs could not hatch. The insecticide was eventually banned in America, but is still in the ecosystem; along with paraquat it was found as standard by Alan and Vose in the lands south of the border. Just a couple of poisoned small birds would kill a falcon. Oil sludge is another huge hazard in Mexico. And Alan is told that in Argentina, the woods are all cleared to leave wheat fields, so falcons perch on the trees planted to shelter estancia buildings; the ranch hands take pot shots at them. No wonder the top predator bird population has crashed and few of each year's brood returns. Conservation and breeding efforts are described.

Alan was shocked, sad and disappointed when his last falcon headed arrow-straight out over the Gulf of Mexico, because he knew that this healthy bird could not make it all the way across the water. Falcons can't fly all that way as they don't store fat, and have to migrate around by land, it was assumed. But he wasn't seeing any on land. He thought his bird was doomed. And the small plane fuel tanks would not let him follow. Once more Alan tries to explain his fascination and lengthy absence to his girlfriend.

The afterword tells us where the bird probably went, like the Texan flats. Not so daft after all. Today birds are tracked by satellite, but this flight memoir gives a real feeling of what it's like to fly through a cloud layer, get buffeted by a storm, spot perching places for the night and cover completely unknown landscapes. I strongly recommend the read for people interested in nature or small planes.

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## Cyd says

Sort of a poor man's version of a "Big Year," focusing on just one remarkable kind of bird. I felt bad for the author's long-suffering girlfriend, but also admired his obsession--really, he is in love with birds, particularly falcons, and with their wildness. The story had elements of *The Big Year*, *On the Road*, *Silent Spring*, and maybe even a little bit of *The African Queen*. The inexorable march of human "progress" and industry (those vast sludge ponds!) is distressing and depressing. But the birds' tenacity in the face of overwhelming odds--possibly even death and eventual extinction--somehow inspires hope.

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## Laura says

Whew! Finally finished this one up. It was a fascinating read but not a quick one, that's for certain. I never stopped being interested; the book never dragged for me, it just took a long time to get through for some reason. Tennant is very obviously incredibly knowledgeable about birds, especially falcons, and I learned a huge amount. I felt he also really captured the unique personality of his pilot. Oddly, though, there were only a few moments in the book where his deep love for the birds they were following and the joys and disappointments of their journey really shone through for me. Most of the time, I felt I was travelling along with a clinical scientist, not an emotionally involved layman. Definitely a good read nonetheless.

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## Troy says

The one-phrase rundown: a well-written hell of a ride.

This, like *Sunk Without a Sound*, was a book I picked up in a VC at a national park, this time Big Bend. Alan Tennant is a Texas-based writer whose numerous otherworks include a field guide to snakes. Someone from my old stomping ground who *likes* snakes? I thought. That was rare enough to warrant further investigation.

I found the book to a real page-turner. It details the author's obsession with following several radio-tagged peregrine falcons from Alaska to central America. Alan and his barnstorming pilot George pull off some amazing exploits in this tale, including impersonating Texas DPS (state troopers), being mistaken for DEA agents, stealing US Army telemetry gear, and sneaking across international borders in a small plane with a broken radio. I was unable to ascertain exactly when these events occurred, but my suspicion was the late 80s to early 90s, since he probably had to wait to publish until the statutes of limitation had expired on some of his feats :)

Part of the fun of reading about their deeds of daring do was realizing how special those adventures really were; many of the things Alan and George did in the air will never again happen in our post-9/11 world. For me, it was also very entertaining to fly along with Alan and George to long-forgotten places from my adolescence. I wonder if I'll ever read another book mentioning Poteet, Texas (it's all about the strawberries in Poteet).

I highly recommend this book, even if you didn't have the good fortune to grow up in Texas (it's a frigging joke - just grin and don't give me a bunch of crap). I think private pilots would really enjoy the aerial aspects and I've recommended it to some with whom I've flown, including my dad who plied the Texas skies. Basically, the story is wonderful and Tennant is a gifted writer.

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## Paul Womack says

Recently rediscovered when unpacking books, I read this volume while at Taji, Iraq in 2004. It is a wonderful story of the route taken by Amelia, a peregrine falcon, on the migration from south Texas to the Artic Circle. I loved the writing, the naturalism, the adventure, the sympathy of Tennant for Amelia, and the paradigm of the migration my heart and soul desired then, and still does, to take... To find a way home. The great paragraph is found on page 77.

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### **David R. says**

This one was a major disappointment for me. There's some attention to the life of Peregrine Falcons, but the book is really much more about the thinking of a person who is entirely too self-centered and ( ). I'm not keen on being preached at by someone who has real problems with law and authority, who can't get his own relationships properly prioritized, and who plants a huge carbon footprint down while sniffing about the habits of the rest of us. You're no role model, kid.

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### **Jennifer says**

This was difficult to get into and most of the first third was boring. I almost gave up, but then it started improving, and it also successfully incorporated some of the science behind peregrine falcon behavior. I found the discussion offshore drilling platform ornithology especially interesting. It's a shame they couldn't have joined an ornithological expedition instead of trying to do everything by themselves and running into so much trouble in Central America. I could have done without some of the relationship drama, but this was at least as much quest narrative as science, so it wasn't completely out of place.

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### **Karen Erdmann says**

I am listening to this book on audio book CDs. Alan Tennant, both writer and narrator, is taking me on a journey of a lifetime. The layers of this story are rich and deep. As a birder I was passionate about that focus but quickly learned that Alan brings a fullness to his teaching by layering in geography, culture, science, human relationships and of course the Peregrine Falcons that he follows. I am sure it is a great read, it is most certainly an incredible read/listen.

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### **J.L. Sutton says**

On the Wing drew me in. I was intrigued by the author following peregrine falcons from his Cessna and investigating their migration patterns (from Texas to the Arctic to the Caribbean...). On the Wing is an incredible adventure. I can appreciate Tennant's obsession with tracking the peregrine; however, as the story shifted from the peregrine to Tennant's own life, I began to lose some interest.

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### **Lisa says**

Listening to audiobook, read by author, whose voice reminds me slightly of Roy Blount, Jr. Excellent story so far. The asides can be mildly distracting, but IMO that's not a problem in an audiobook.

It almost felt like two connected tales since Tennant first follows Amelia north to her breeding grounds, then tracks three Peregrines on their southerly migration. I was most intrigued during Amelia's tale, but found the other to be pleasant also. Birders, naturalists, and travelers may enjoy this audiobook.

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## **Daniel Currie says**

I listened to the 5CD abridged version of this book.

This is more or less an adventure story centered on the chase for several tagged peregrine falcons.

The main point in any book like this is how much it draws you in. In this case it didn't. Altho they certainly go thru alot (some would say much too much) to try and track these birds, I never got caught up in the adventure. Maybe if you were a hardcore birder that might help, but I am not. It occasionally veers into the romance and philosophy of life, love and chasing a dream, but it simply didn't add up for me.

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## **Matt says**

The worst part about the book was the lack of the year it took place, which would have really helped set the scene. I could tell it was obviously pre-sept. 11th, 2001, but after it really bothering me for a long time, I think it probably actually took place sometime in the '80s. I even searched the author online for a bit and couldn't figure it out. The publication date (2005) did not help at all. Anyway, it is about two random guys who fly a plane after some peregrine falcons using stolen army radio tracking equipment, and track some falcons through canada all the way to alaska, and then some others down into mexico and guatamala (starting in texas both times). pretty cool.

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