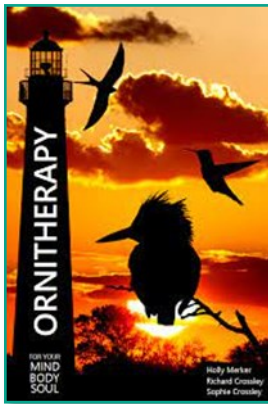




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Contributed by Nancy Laplante

ORNITHERAPY

Many years ago our son got us interested in birdwatching as he was the first in our family to truly notice the variety of birds we had in our Pennsylvania yard and the way they explored their surroundings. We proceeded to add bird feeders and bird houses wherever we could over many years, and now that I am settled in Easton I have begun to rediscover birdwatching, taking in the sights and sounds of familiar and new friends.



Birdwatching connects us with nature and our gardens. Many of us select plants to attract birds and provide them with shelter. This past Christmas my son gave me a gift that has opened my eyes to another way to enjoy birds and nature, through explorations known as **Ornithery**. The gift was a book entitled *Ornithery for your Mind, Body and Soul* by Holly Merker, Richard Crossley and Sophie Crossley. The authors explain that our wellness journey does not always need to be a vacation getaway but rather one can step outside in nature and use birds as a vehicle for self-care. Their book contains 58 explorations and 5 meditations, with a section in the back to journal and reflect. The explorations are meant to empower you to connect with birds and nature in a mindful way, guiding you

on a voyage of observation. The meditations are designed to slow you down and be mindful in the present moment, connecting with the world around and within us.

I found the discussion on mindfulness particularly interesting and agree with the authors that one does not need to sit in silence to be mindful. When we allow ourselves to be one with nature, observing and asking ourselves questions, we develop a deeper connection and perhaps some insight as to where we fit in to the world.



Holly Merker and her fellow authors have a website where you can explore more and order their book: <https://ornithery.com>. You will also find a link to national events, several near us in the Delaware and Philadelphia areas. Some of these events are introductions to *Ornithery*, and others are more personal; for example Holly shares how birdwatching helped her during her breast cancer experience, boosting her overall health and wellness. There are also links to additional books, such as *Bird Guides* by Richard Crossley.

Another author, Marta Curti, nicely sums up why *Ornithotherapy* matters, especially in this post-pandemic time, in an online article <https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/news/birdwatching/ornithotherapy-therapeutic-power-birdwatching> in the following way:

“Over the past year, three things have become clear: First, that self-care is key, especially if we are in a position of caring for others. Second, being mindful — fully present in the moment — can help us regulate emotions and even positively influence our thought patterns in the long-term. Finally, one of the best ways to care for ourselves and to practice mindfulness is focusing on the wonders of the natural world.”

I have begun my explorations in my neighborhood based on the gifted book, with the first exploration being *“Learning to Look.”* It’s an easy way to begin, encouraging the reader to step outside, slow your pace, and stay as quiet as possible. This advice is in itself a nice way to approach the start of the day, and I’ll leave you with the quote shared in this chapter as a reflective thought for the day. ☺



***“The present moment is filled with joy and happiness.
If you are attentive, you will see it.”***

~Thich Naht Hahn