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FLIGHT PATHS

A FIELD JOURNAL OF HOPE,
HEARTBREAK, AND MIRACLES WITH
NEW YORK'S BIRD PEOPLE

DARRYL McGRATH



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22 b/w photos, 5 figures

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DARRYL McGRATH is a journalist living in Albany, New York. She has written about upstate New York's environment and rural regions for over twenty years and has won numerous awards for her reporting from the New York Press Association, the New York Associated Press Association, and the Society of Professional Journalists.


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Praise for **Flight Paths**

“Not since David R. Zimmerman’s *To Save a Bird in Peril* has there been a popular book on rare and endangered birds so well researched and documented as this one ... [a] sympathetic and well-written book.”

— **TOM J. CADE**, Founding Chairman and Director,
The Peregrine Fund

“...McGrath weaves together science, politics, personal struggle, and the emotional gravity of permanent loss into poignant tales of survival.”

— **WILLIAM C. JANEWAY**, Executive Director,
Adirondack Council

In the late 1970s, the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon were heading toward extinction, victims of the combined threats of DDT, habitat loss, and lax regulation. *Flight Paths* tells the story of how a small group of New York biologists raced against nature’s clock to bring these two beloved birds back from the brink in record-setting numbers.

In a narrative that reads like a suspense tale, Darryl McGrath documents both rescue projects in never-before-published detail. At Cornell University, a team of scientists worked to crack the problem of how to breed peregrine falcons in captivity and then restore them to the wild. Meanwhile, two young, untested biologists tackled the overwhelming assignment of rebuilding the bald eagle population from the state’s last nesting pair, one of whom (the female) was sterile.

McGrath interweaves this dramatic retelling with contemporary accounts of four at-risk species: the short-eared owl, the common loon, the Bicknell’s thrush, and the piping plover. She worked alongside biologists as they studied these elusive subjects in the Northeast’s most remote regions, and the result is a story that combines vivid narrative with accessible science and is as much a tribute to these experts as it is a call to action for threatened birds.

Readers are taken to a snow-covered meadow as an owl hunts her prey, a loon family’s secluded pond, an eagle nest above the Hudson River, and a mountaintop at dusk in search of the Bicknell’s thrush, one of the planet’s rarest birds. Combining a little-known chapter of New York’s natural history with a deeply personal account of a lifelong devotion to birds, *Flight Paths* is not only a story of our rapidly changing environment and a tribute to some of New York’s most heroic biologists, but also a captivating read for anyone who has ever thrilled to the sight of a rare bird.