



# Roger Tory Peterson

Environmentalist, author ( 1908 – 1996 )

Peterson was a naturalist, artist, educator, and photographer who perhaps did more than any other American to spark in the public a widespread interest and concern for the natural world.

Peterson was born in Jamestown, New York, where he began drawing birds when he was 11 years old. After graduating from high school, he moved to New York City to study art, though he was largely self-taught. He taught science and art briefly at the Rivers School in Brookline, Massachusetts.

In 1934, he published his seminal *Guide to the Birds*, the first modern field guide, which sold out its first printing of 2,000 copies in one week, and subsequently went through five editions. He co-wrote *Wild America* with James Fisher, and edited or wrote many of the volumes in the *Peterson Field Guide* series on topics ranging from rocks and minerals to beetles to reptiles. He developed the Peterson Identification System, and is known for the clarity of both his illustrations of field guides and his delineation of relevant field marks. His series now numbers over 50 titles.

Paul R. Ehrlich wrote, "In this century, no one has done more to promote an interest in living creatures than Roger Tory Peterson, the inventor of the modern field guide."

Peterson received every major American award for natural science, ornithology, and conservation, as well as numerous honorary medals, diplomas, and citations, including the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Order of the Golden Ark of the Netherlands.

He said of himself, "I consider myself to have been the bridge between the shotgun and the binoculars in bird watching. Before I came along, the primary way to observe birds was to shoot them and stuff them."

He died in 1996 at his home in Old Lyme, Connecticut.