

Roger Tory Peterson

1908-1996 | Artist & Conservationist

Roger Tory Peterson loved birds. When he was 11, he was out walking. He saw a pile of feathers, which he thought was an injured bird. It turned out that the bird was just tired from its long migration. When he poked it, the bird flew off. After that, he paid 10¢ every year to be a member of the Junior Audubon Club, a group for kids interested in birds.

Roger's first job was decorating painted furniture in a factory. His boss saw his talent and encouraged him to study art. Roger studied at the National Academy of Design in New York City. As an adult, he moved to Old Lyme, Connecticut, where he had his art studio and worked for more than 40 years.

Roger took his love of art and his love of birds and combined them in *A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America*, a book he published in 1934. Before this book, most "field guides" were written only for serious ornithologists (people who study birds), not for regular people. Roger's book was small, so that people could easily carry it with them when they went bird-watching. It had clear, useful pictures, with arrows pointing out the important features of each type of bird. The book was so popular that the first 2,000 copies sold out in two weeks. Roger went on to write many other field guides. He traveled to all



Roger Tory Peterson, courtesy David Hosking/FLPA



One of Roger Tory Peterson's illustrations,
courtesy Roger Tory Peterson Institute

50 states, more than 80 countries, and all seven continents to observe and record birds.

Roger's work helped millions of people see the natural world and be inspired by it. Roger felt strongly that studying nature made people want to protect the environment more. In the 1950s and 1960s, Roger saw for himself that some pesticides were killing birds or causing them not to have babies. The numbers of birds near his Connecticut home went way down.

Roger spoke in front of the United States Congress about the harm pesticides caused to animals and the environment. He also spoke out about other ways that people damaged animal habitats.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter awarded Roger the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Because of his work to protect animals and the environment, Roger was also nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize.

For more information, visit:

<https://connecticuthistory.org/artist-roger-tory-peterson-champions-for-the-natural-world/>

<https://connecticuthistory.org/roger-tory-peterson-dies-today-in-history/>

<https://rtpi.org/about/about-roger-tory-peterson/>

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