

THE ROLE OF BIRDS IN WORLD WAR TWO

HOW ORNITHOLOGY HELPED TO WIN THE WAR

Nicholas Milton

Pen & Sword, 224 pages, £25

It's no coincidence that the most famous song from the Second World War features birds. Vera Lynn sang the inspirational words anticipating an Allied victory: there would be "bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover".

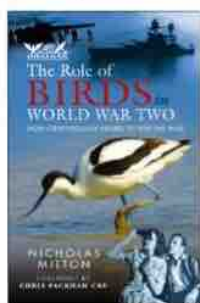
The way that birds inspired people or kept them going during the dark days of war is a recurring theme of ornithologist and historian Nicholas Milton's book. Field Marshal Alanbrooke watched and filmed birds to help him cope with the stress he was under; three British inmates of Singapore's notorious Changi Prison wrote a secret bird book to distract themselves; and birds may even have inspired the design of the Spitfire. On a wider scale, one of the most popular wartime publications was *Watching Birds* by James Fisher, which sold three million copies.

Occasionally, birds participated

in the war directly. Messenger pigeons were sometimes the only means of communication available, and certain birds performed so heroically – bringing a vital message home against terrible odds – that they were decorated.

Another theme of the book is the way in which wartime activities affected the population of some bird species. Flooding the East Anglia shoreline to deter invasion brought the avocet back to the UK, while peregrines were shot in large numbers to stop them attacking Allied messenger pigeons.

This intriguing and thought-provoking title explores the links between birds and many aspects of the conflict, from the home front to the front line.



EH Ware wrote a book about the birds he saw while he was in the RAF

DR SIMON WILLS is a historian and genealogist, and the author of *A History of Birds* (White Owl, 2017)

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A JEWISH GIRL IN PARIS

MELANIE LEVENSOHN; TRANSLATED BY JAMIE LEE SEARLE
Macmillan, 448 pages, £16.99

This very powerful debut novel written by Melanie Levensohn is inspired by the story of one of her husband's relatives.

The book, which is a journey of discovery, is set in three different periods: first Montreal in 1982, then Paris in 1940 and Washington DC in 2006. I was hooked from the very beginning because it



is like a family history detective story, searching for the truth about unknown relations who are only revealed by a father on his death bed. Another theme is the lengths that you have to go to if you want to find out about your Jewish ancestors who suffered in the Holocaust.

A Jewish Girl In Paris pays great attention to the accuracy of

historic details, and the depiction of the 1940s feels extremely authentic.

This novel would appeal to anyone who is interested in the Second World War, and the plight of the Jews who lived in France at this time.

Also, it will make any family historian consider how they would go about finding their own forebears' details in a similar situation.

FICTION



KATE HURLEY, EXETER

Kate has been researching her family history for 17 years, and is currently discovering what she can learn about her ancestry through DNA analysis

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