



BOOK REVIEW

The Real James Bond: A True Story of Identity Theft, Avian Intrigue & Ian Fleming

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The Real James Bond: A True Story of Identity Theft, Avian Intrigue & Ian Fleming by Jim Wright. 2020. Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, PA, USA. 144 pp., 109 photographs. \$24.99 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-7643-4186-1.

James Bond (1900–1989), Philadelphia ornithologist, will always be associated with the various editions of his *Birds of the West Indies* (1936). For a few years the fifth edition was part of the *Peterson Field Guide Series* (1993), although it does not present lineups of a dozen or more species per plate in similar postures as most field guides now do. In many titles about that area, Bond's 27 supplements to the *Checklist of Birds of the West Indies* (1956) are cited. Curiously, the first edition of *Birds of the West Indies* (Raffaele et al. 2003) does not cite Bond in their otherwise extensive bibliography, whereas titles by Kirwan et al. (2019), Buckley et al. (2009), Garrido and Kirkeonnell (2000) do.

This is a wide-ranging and vastly entertaining biography, aptly described by its subtitle. In the best 007 manner, the chapters and appendices are all preceded by 2 zeros. There are chapters on Ian Fleming, how he chose the name James Bond for his 007, and his life in Jamaica.

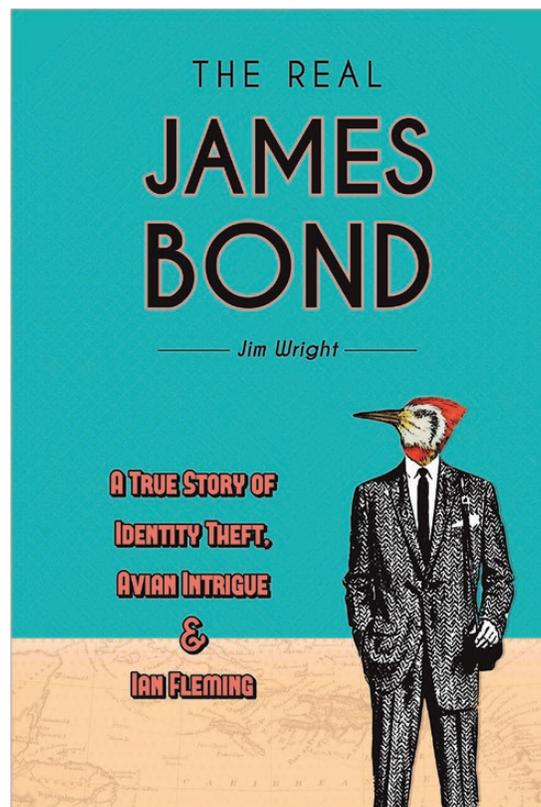
The Real James Bond is a richly illustrated title. There are 109 illustrations, including 20 of Bond, 14 of books, 3 maps, 6 of Fleming or his Jamaica abode, 4 of stamps, and several of places where Bond lived or worked. Wright has researched Bond deeply, visited places where Bond lived, interviewed 25 people, collected Bond's publications,

delved into 007-iana, and much more. Especially choice are the 2 Republic of Mali postage stamps featuring paintings of Bond as part of its "Les grand ornithologues" series. Another, a Cuban stamp, shows the Zapata Rail (*Cyanolimnas cerverai*). Bond collected both the endangered rail and the Bahama Nuthatch (*Sitta insularis*), recently split from the Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusila*).

Bond made over 100 trips to the West Indies, some lasting weeks. Prone to seasickness, he persevered. He mostly disdained binoculars. Instead, he collected birds, but not voluminously so. In the early days many of his lodgings were primitive, come by extemporaneously. Reserved, shy even, he disdained publicity, and was uncomfortable with the fame that came after Ian Fleming appropriated his name for 007. As Wright makes evident, a lot of Bond's life is made explicit by 3 books his wife, Mary Wickham Bond, wrote after they married, when both were in their fifties: *How 007 Got His Name* (1966), *To James Bond with Love* (1980), and *Far Afield in the Caribbean: Migratory Flights of a Naturalist's Wife* (1971). These tend to be

gushy, hagiographic even, but are full of important details. A list of his trips, the when and where, would have added value to Wright's book, but may not be possible to reconstruct.

Interestingly, Wright goes into fascinating detail on ornithologists who did spy work, the most famous being



S. Dillon Ripley. Those involved were usually members of the Central Intelligence Agency's predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Because so many Ivy League and prep school graduates were in the OSS, the joke was that the letters stood for Oh So Social. Wright also describes other spy ornithologists described in chapter 008, including Richard Meinertzhagen, James Chapin, W. Rudyerd Boulton, Ripley, Herbert Deignan, Brooke Dolan, Frederick Crockett, and Emmett Reid Blake. In chapter 009, Wright leaves unresolved whether Bond indeed was a spy. Agencies were, and remain silent on this, and we are left with the tantalizing conclusion that he might have been.

It is said that every man has 3 lives: a public life, a private life, and a secret life. Indeed, some who are married for over 50 yr often find that some aspects of their spouse surprisingly remain a mystery. Wright notes that Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (ANSP) colleague Bob Peck said that Bond "went under the radar as much as he could and resented any kind of publicity." Wright includes 2 marvelous, puckish photographs that capture this aspect of Bond. One shows him partially visible behind a mostly closed door. Another, at the book's end, shows Bond in his office enigmatically preparing to turn out an overhead light. Especially peculiar is that, after half a century of work at ANSP, and receiving its highest honor, Bond left most of his estate to the Smithsonian Institution. Wright offers several theories for this.

Bond led a largely tripartite life: explorer and bird collector in the West Indies, for half a century; a tweedy, pipe-smoking bird curator-gentleman in Philadelphia's ANSP; and as a summer resident in tony Mount Desert Island, Maine. This recalls somewhat the bi-riparian life of the great English explorer, Sir Wilfred Thesiger, who spent about half of each year living with nomadic peoples in northeast Africa, Arabia, and the Tigris-Euphrates Delta, and the rest of the year dressed formally in London attending Explorers Club meetings.

There are a few minor errors in the book. The full-page color photograph of the only time Bond met Ian Fleming appears twice in the book, on pp. 16 and 64, and Ripley is the second from the left not second from the right in the photograph on p. 94. The index refers to Scott McConnell on p. 135, but he is on p. 136, and "Long Valley lockjaw" should be "Locust Valley lockjaw", an expression in *The Official Preppy Handbook* (Birnbach 1980) for the inhibited way many aristocratic folks speak.

Kenneth Parkes' obituary of Bond (1989) describes his accent best: "an amalgam of New England, British, and upper-class Philadelphia." Indexes for most books, even good ones such as this, are usually not exhaustive. Wright's bibliography is not intended to be complete,

but in light of his description of an apparent conspiracy involving Bond and Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee to rid ANSP of him, it might have included Melbourne Armstrong Carriker, Jr.'s *Experiences of an Ornithologist along the Highways and Byways of Bolivia: Collecting Birds in an Isolated Magnificent Land in the Nineteen Thirties* (2006). Wright does not list all of Bond's publications; indeed, as he indicates, this has already been done (Aubrecht 2017). Wright explains that such actions of Bond, de Schauensee, and others are symptomatic of some of the old-school naturalists who were unsalaried, so-called "Dollar-a-year" men who were independently wealthy, a somewhat Victorian or Edwardian carryover to our times. This is not to disparage their many genuine contributions. Bond and de Schauensee collaborated for decades, although some of the latter's major titles are largely derivative. Likewise, there are 2 aspects of Bond's guides I believe have not received the attention they deserve. First, his guides are a treasury of colloquial names: Spanish, French, English, and various patois. Second, the dates for species' periods of occurrence are surprisingly detailed, as if local bird clubs had observers out every week, not the case, all through the year.

It is a pleasure to highly recommend this entertaining biography of James Bond, which also is full of 007 and Ian Fleming lore. Wright keenly describes Bond's aristocratic upbringing and relatives, his education at St. Paul's School and years in England, his writings, and his ornithological legacy. An obdurate researcher, Wright has been to all the relevant archives, libraries, has spoken to many key persons, and has traveled extensively for first-hand experiences of places Bond lived and worked. Well done.

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