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LOCAL NEWS AND CULTURE

# No Page Unturned

Five essential books  
for understanding  
New Mexico

By Laura Paskus

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# No Page Unturned

## Five essential books for understanding New Mexico

BY LAURA PASKUS

There are a lot of things Edward Abbey didn't like: dams, fences, billboards—and cars in national parks. Writing of his time working at Arches National Park, in *Desert Solitaire*, he railed against visitors who never stepped from their vehicles: “Let the people walk. Or ride horses, bicycles, mules, wild pigs—anything—but keep the automobiles and the motorcycles and all their motorized relatives out.”

While I agree with Abbey, I recently realized that I've been missing out on something really cool. So, late last year, I asked my daughter and my boyfriend to join me on a trip to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.

OK, yes, if you like solitude—or, say, are pathologically averse to the sight of other human beings in natural settings—it is an agonizing place to visit.

While driving the loop, cars piled up behind us each time we stopped to peer at a kestrel, red-tailed hawk or raven. When we did score a quiet observation platform—to watch bald eagles or a pair of coyotes hunting mice—chatty tourists or serious birdwatchers with binoculars and checklists flanked us within moments.

Then, just about sunset, we pulled to the side of the muddy road. Across an expanse of fields to the north, we could hear the distant rabble of waterfowl. Within moments, thousands—*tens* of thousands—of snow geese and sandhill cranes headed over us to roost for the night. Flying in streaming flocks and sloppy Vs, their croaks and calls of homecoming were all that possibly mattered in the world.

The scene was so noisy that I didn't even realize that my daughter was yelling, “GO, GEESE, GO!” And when the sky did finally quiet, the three of us just stood there, grinning. Up the road, a woman in her 30s looked over, threw her arms into the air and yelled: “Woooooo!”

Whooping joy, a connection with something wild that forever becomes familiar—that's what 92,000 snow geese and about 25,000 sandhill cranes can do for you. But you have to get out of the car. Abbey is mostly right, but he's not all the way right.

Even though we barely stepped outside, that experience connected my daughter and me to the Rio Grande in a new way. It has affected how we observe wildlife in our own neighborhood; it has changed the way we draw and write about the world we inhabit.

The writers and photographers interviewed here have undoubtedly been changed by New Mexico's landscapes; during interviews with SFR about their books, almost all of them spoke of their love for the state. And while there are people—even some writers themselves—who say that books don't matter much when it comes to changing the world, I disagree. Words and images printed upon the page can educate and enlighten, even create a sense of camaraderie. One book, just like one sunset's worth of snow geese and sandhill cranes, can ignite the desire to know more. In this issue, SFR offers readers insight into five recent books that explore New Mexico's environment. Looking for inspiration? Go outside. Seeking knowledge? Start here.



Tens of thousands of snow geese spend the winter at Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge.

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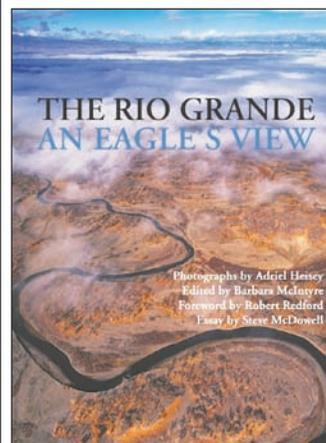
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## No Page Unturned



### The Rio Grande: An Eagle's View

Photographs by Adriel Heisey  
Edited by Barbara McIntyre  
Foreword by Robert Redford  
University of New Mexico Press, 2011

Tracing the course of the Rio Grande from its headwaters in Colorado to where it pours—or, nowadays, dribbles—into the Gulf of Mexico, in *The Rio Grande: An Eagle's View*, photographer Adriel Heisey reveals the river's curves and

sinews; he hovers above places where her waters have been pressed between concrete walls. He also captures the shape of sandbars as they spread downstream and the moment of a bird's landing in the water. This is a book of moments, strung together to tell the story of a river.

"The whole project was a journey of learning," Heisey says of the book, which was published by the nonprofit WildEarth Guardians and conceived by its executive director, John Horning. "Like most people, I had a dim perception of the Rio Grande's geography." Watching the river travel its course was a profound and humbling experience for Heisey, who learned to fly at age 15 and currently works for the Navajo Nation, transporting officials.

Flying almost daily over the Four Corners, Heisey found himself becoming more serious about photography, and about 20 years ago, he decided to build his own airplane.

Seeking direct access to the sky and landscapes, he built what might best be described as an aerial motorcycle. With the engine behind the wings, Heisey sits in an exposed seat and controls the slow, low-flying plane with his legs. With his hands free for holding the camera, he can compose shots as he would standing on the ground. "For me, that was the holy grail," he says of his plane: "the ability to almost kind of loiter in the air over the landscape."

Loitering over the landscape also gives him a heightened perception of his surroundings when he's on the ground. "I don't think 'revelation' is too strong a word for what happens when I go airborne," Heisey says. "To carry that sense of expanded perception with me all the time is one of the joys of being a pilot."

Having shared the experience with friends, he realizes that most people feel apprehensive, rather than wondrous, while flying in such a small aircraft. "I've gone way beyond that sense of apprehension to a place where I feel completely comfortable," he says. "That means my heart can completely open when I'm up there because it's not contracted by fear or anxiety." After three decades of flying, Heisey still sounds as excited as he must have felt at 15, taking his first flight. For him, this book—his fourth—is a way to share with people the deeper understanding and wider experience he gains from flying, from experiencing transcendence in the air.

And that's probably what makes *The Rio Grande: An Eagle's View* more than just a pretty coffee table book. Instead, it feels like a call to action—that is, a call to come to the river. To walk among the cottonwoods, navigate ditches and acequias to find their sources and catch a glimpse of the birds who consider the bosque home. The book itself isn't an end, but rather the means to bring Heisey's revelations down to the surface of the river's waters.



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