

Bearded Tit - A Love story with feathers by Rory McGrath. Ebury Press 2008.

To the ranks of bearded birdwatchers Rory McGrath must now be added, though I suspect there is few of that ilk with his photographic memory for birds' Latin names.

This is a wonderfully engaging book, drawing the reader in to the travails of the author's life, and particularly his painful and lengthy courtship of JJ while a student in Cambridge. As a natural wit, Rory McGrath's writing is sometimes funny out loud, but it is also lyrical, when writing about the birds he loves, cringe-makingly amusing, when talking about his early sexual experiences, and poignant when detailing the redemptive role that bird watching, and the photography of birds, played in the life of his drinking chum and friend Danny.

As a birdwatcher Rory McGrath comes across as surprisingly normal, and certainly not as an obsessive: I could think of no higher compliment having finished the book than to say that his company in a hide would be perfect for any enthusiastic amateur ornithologist, albeit running the risk that the birds might be frightened away by gales of laughter.

This is a book for both fans of Rory, and those who have a keen interest in birds, and is a rewarding insight into the life of a seriously funny man with a laudably serious side.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh