

Study questions for Tim Birkhead's book  
**The Most Perfect Thing**  
**Inside and (and Outside) a Bird's Egg**  
Questions written by Dan Stahler for the OPAS Book Club

1. By far the most familiar egg is the chicken egg. After reading the book, did you look differently at the eggs you cook and eat? Did the book affect your opinion of how chickens are raised and used to produce eggs?
  
2. Birkhead challenges the long held theory that the elongated shape of the guillemot's egg is to deter it from rolling off the nesting cliff. Is he successful?
  
3. Was this book too heavy on the scientific side to be considered for a book club choice? How much of the scientific material did you just skim over for the more prosaic sections, such as the descriptions of the climmers and the eccentric egg collector George Lupton?
  
4. Birkhead presents past and present theories of why eggs are colored. Which one do you believe?
  
5. By modern standards we may condemn Lupton or even Audubon for destructive methods used to study birds. On pages 157-160 are descriptions of recent study methods of wild birds. Birkhead writes of feeding wild birds dye to study yolk development or collecting fresh eggs of wild birds for study. (I would assume unwilling) wild finches and ducks are used as subjects for mating experiments. Stressful netting and banding is still employed. Is this ethical and justified for scientific gain?
  
6. Birkhead writes of government cuts to his long-term study of guilemots. After joining forces with an artist he successfully used crowd sourcing to fund the studies. With our shutdowns and other government setbacks does this seem like a future for scientific studies? Is it maybe a better way to fund some types of research rather than use tax dollars?

7. Birkhead obviously thinks eggs are beautiful from many aspects. Bird chicks and eggs may seem beautiful to the mother bird. Considering our last book selections, *The Evolution of Beauty*, and *The 6<sup>th</sup> Extinction*, would these sentiments help or hinder the conservation and survival of birds?

(consider that Birkhead partnered with an artist to sell his ideas to fund his studies)

Painting of Marbled Murrelet by artist and author Joan Dunning from the book *Seabird in the Forest*.



One morning, there is the tiniest tapping from within the shell. The female feels it against her leg. More tapping ... and she feels the beak push free! More tapping ... stillness ... tapping ... stillness. When the mother stands up, there is a small, buff-colored, downy chick with bright eyes.