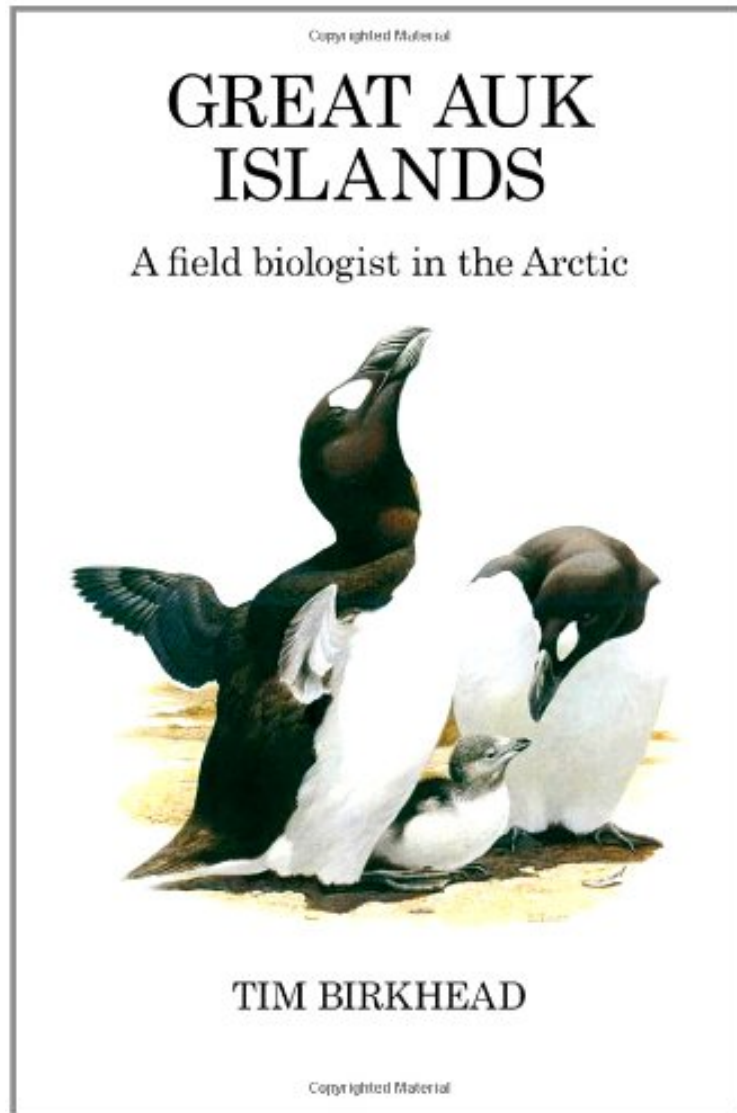


## Great Auk Islands; a Field Biologist in the Arctic (Poyser Monographs)

*Tim Birkhead*

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**Tim Birkhead : Great Auk Islands; a Field Biologist in the Arctic (Poyser Monographs)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Great Auk Islands; a Field Biologist in the Arctic (Poyser Monographs):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Understanding what 'scientists' do and whyBy Ian StewartIn this book, professional biologist Tim Birkhead describes his years studying the breeding biology of seabirds in isolated arctic regions. Note however, that this is no dry ornithological text bogged down with eye-straining tables of data and

statistics. Although the science is there for all to see, and the take home messages are as clear as crystal, they are nestled within a hugely enjoyable tale of what it is like to study wild animals in their natural habitat. The rugged beauty and remoteness of arctic cliffs and islands is captured well by the author's style, which borders on the reverential without being romantic. At times, I almost felt as though I was perched on a cliff alongside the author, watching crowds of auks (murre) squabbling on their tiny breeding ledges! This book also gives a readable synopsis of avian reproductive physiology put in the context of what one actually observes from the outside, as well as a good account of seabird natural history. What separates this book from others of its ilk is the author's willingness to bare his soul to the reader, giving the book a very personal feel with the description of some rather troubled events that most people would have shied away from even mentioning. Equally interesting is a chapter describing how scientists actually work, and what motivates them to devote so much effort into questions which the casual observer would happily leave unanswered. I learned a lot from this book, at several different levels, and would strongly recommend it to laypeople with an interest in natural history or wilderness travel, as well as practising or prospective scientists.

This is an extraordinary book describing the biology of species living in one of the harshest environments on earth, providing a fascinating insight into the way that scientists conduct their studies. Author of many successful ornithology books (including *The Magpies* and *Sperm Competition in Birds*), Tim Birkhead has developed a polished and engaging style which makes this book an informative, evocative and lively read.