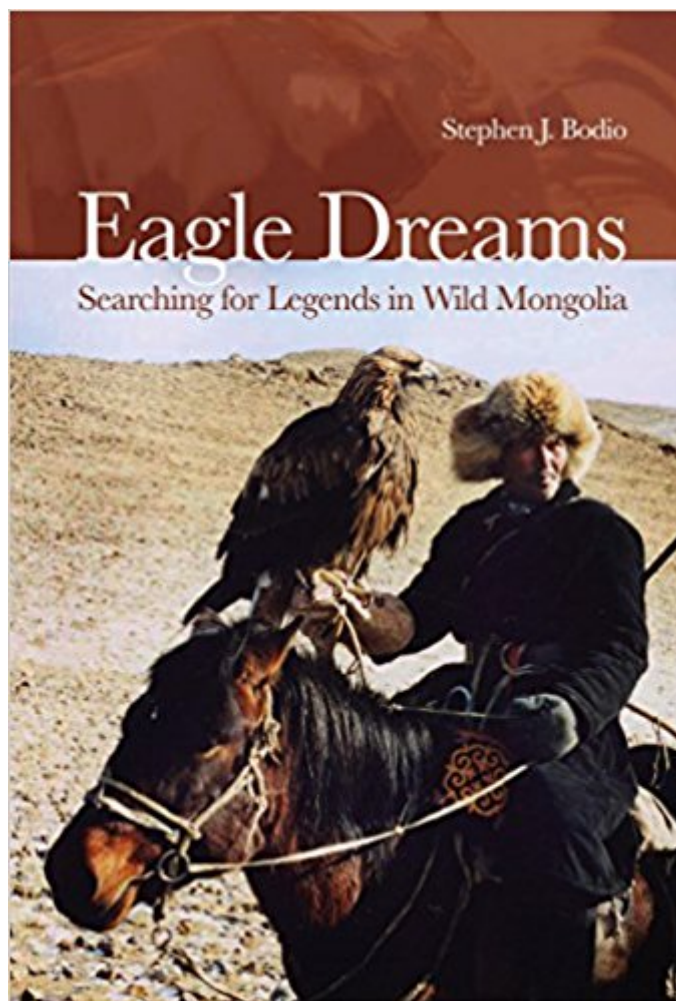


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# Eagle Dreams: Searching For Legends In Wild Mongolia



## Synopsis

In praise of books by the author: "Bodio writes like Pavarotti sings. He is a master." --Tony Hillerman (for *Querencia*) "Stephen Bodio has written an unpretentious yet thrilling book about falconry, one of man's oldest and most mysterious alliances in the natural world; and he takes us afield under the wild skies of birds of prey." --Thomas McGuane (for *A Rage for Falcons*) "Fascinating, funny, sad, beautiful . . . *Aloft* is full of wonderful images and energy." --Annie Proulx

When Stephen Bodio was a young boy in the early 50's he saw an image in *National Geographic* which became forever etched in his mind: it was a photograph of a Kazakh nomad, dressed in a long coat and wearing a fur hat, holding a huge tame eagle on his fist. And a life-long fascination with Central Asia was born. Mongolia, a vast country located between Siberia and China and little known to outsiders, was long under Soviet domination and inaccessible to westerners. When it became independent in 1990 Bodio began planning a pilgrimage to see if the eagle hunters of "The Picture" had survived. A life-long falconer himself, he longed to visit the birth place of falconry and observe the traditions that had survived intact through the ages. His fantasy was realized when he traveled independently twice to the westernmost region of Mongolia and spent months with the people and birds of his dreams. The ancient rituals of hunting with eagles are fascinating and the remarkable relationship these nomadic people have with their birds of prey is thrilling. With vivid prose and humor, Bodio gives life to his dreams and the people, landscapes, and animals of Mongolia that have become part of his soul.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Bodio offers insightful, heartfelt, and often humorous observations of the inhabitants and the landscapes of Mongolia. Recommended for all public and academic libraries."-- Library Journal"

"I always look forward to reading a new book by Stephen Bodio, and this latest work is no disappointment. Besides being an excellent birder and all-around naturalist, Bodio is a keen observer of human nature and culture. His curiosity is boundless, as is his openness to new experiences."--Living Bird

When Stephen Bodio was a young boy in the early fifties he saw an image in National Geographic which became forever etched in his mind: It was a photograph of a Kazakh nomad, dressed in a long coat and wearing a fur hat, holding a huge eagle on his fist. Thus began his fascination with East Asia and with the culture that hunts, not eagles, but with eagles. Mongolia, a vast country located between Siberia and China and little known to outsiders, was long under Soviet domination and inaccessible to westerners. When it became independent in 1990, Bodio began planning a pilgrimage to see if the eagle hunters of "The Picture" had survived. A lifelong falconer himself, he longed to visit the birth place of falconry and observe the traditions that had survived intact through the ages. His fantasy was realized when he traveled independently to the westernmost region of Mongolia and spent months with the people and birds of his dreams. In *Eagle Dreams*, Bodio gives life to his dreams and the people, landscapes, and animals of Mongolia that have become part of his soul.

I purchased this book to educate myself and to help me get excited for an upcoming trip to western Mongolia/ Kazakh eagle land. This book was the only title in english I could find on the topic and the book had great reviews here so the choice to purchase it was easy. While I mostly enjoyed the book I would have appreciated more unbiased information about eagles and the Kazakhs if Bodio had any more to share. With a very few notable exceptions (super-intelligent, emotional mammals with a predilection towards kindness for humans) I have absolutely no issues with people hunting for food or sport as long as the hunted animal belongs to a stable, abundant population and no unnecessary cruelty is involved. That being said, I did not enjoy Bodio's constant Cliven Bundy/Nevada Tea-Party/Fox News flavored political commentary that ran throughout the book. From denigrating liberals, environmentalists, wildlife conservationists and even fisherman who practice catch and release I just didn't see the point including so many of his very American and personal political prejudices in what I thought should have been a fairly non-political book about Mongolian Kazakhs and their remarkable eagles. At one point in the book Bodio berates a fellow American traveller for

having the poor taste and judgement to gift the Mongolians - "oversized T-shirts emblazoned with various NFL logos, looking like the ones gang bangers wore back home." NFL logo equals "gang-banger"? I saw lots of Mongolians wearing American sports jerseys, I seriously doubt gifting one is any kind of cultural faux pas but rather a reflection of Bodio's distaste of fashion he equates with American black culture. This is just one example out of many, but remarks like this didn't add anything to the book while making me feel icky and lowering my opinion of Bodio as a person. Perhaps I misunderstand him, but the effect was the same regardless. Having visited the western Mongolian Kazakhs Bodio writes about I found them every bit as warm, generous, gracious and as good-humored as he describes them. I found their imbalanced diet consisting solely of meat and dairy pitiable and contrary to Bodio's depiction, very hard on their health. Nobody living the traditional Kazakh nomad lifestyle that we met in Western Mongolia seemed to live much past sixty. All of the eagle hunters that were in their forties and fifties when Bodio's book was published in 2003 were already dead of natural causes according to the locals who knew and recognized them from the photos in the book. My twenty-four year old guide confessed a bad case of hemorrhoids and the 34 year old son of our host family inside Altai Tavan Bogd was being treated for cancer. He was one of the many cancer stories we heard while in western Mongolia. While I am not even close to being a doctor I have read enough and know enough about basic nutrition to have no doubts concerning the root cause of the Kazakh's health ailments: A diet consisting solely of meat and dairy devoid of any source of fiber or vegetables. The Mongolian Kazakh's freedom, close family units and their ancient yet intact cultural traditions were enviable, their diet while perhaps a product of necessity as well as culture was another matter altogether and undeserving of being romanticized by anyone in the 21st century. I found the Kazakh's food situation in the remote western corner of the country sad and depressing, but I suppose an endless meat and cheese buffet beats the hell out of going hungry in a very cold, hard land. Definitely visit the western Mongolian Kazakhs if you ever get the chance, they are incredible, but bring some Metamucil and dehydrated vegan chili. Your gut will thank you. Bodio's advice concerning vodka and other practical topics is solid however. Bring a good bit with you and use it to wash down the horse meat and rock hard bland cheese, it was the only thing that helped my stomach cope with the Kazakh meals. The Kazakh hunting eagles are just as majestic and awe-inspiring as Bodio writes. Nothing you read can prepare you for your first encounter.

Captive in every way. This book will make you want to meet the people and the birds in their Arena but not be disappointed if you can't, because it doesn't make you feel you missed something. It's not

your personal experience but that, it seems, of a good friend who honestly and generously tells you his story with entertaining clarity and frankness. Almost as good as being there yourself. Read it!

Fascinating book from one of the greatest sporting authors of our time.

Stephen Bodio doesn't receive the recognition he deserves. He is an artist with words. I felt I was along in his Mongolian adventure.

A friend recently gave me this book, knowing I had taken a trip to the westernmost reaches of Mongolia in winter to be with the Kazakhs who, almost alone in the world, have a tradition of using golden eagles in falconry. Ah, what memories the book summoned. Of sure footed Mongolian horses that ascended through skree I was not sure I could have reached on foot to stand sentinel on mountain peaks, to descents so steep that I folded back on horse hindquarters to keep balance, to the woman in camp milking a two humped camel so we might have it for morning tea, to a landscape both beautiful and harsh. Go if you can! But if not, at least journey there vicariously through this fine book. David Lee Kirkland

This book came in with others on Mongolia I had ordered a month ago and so I thought it was just another aspect of this fascinating country I am presently dedicating my attention to. Instead, as usual, generalization is not for human spirit. Opening the book I found out this naturalist grew up in New England as I did, he has Italian chromosomes and is a novel Frederick II. Immediate sympathy arose. So I dived into this unknown ornithological world (by the way I am scared of birds and I live with terror of an annoying pigeon that once in a while comes into my kitchen). First, a notation on the language which is fantastic. I am amazed that such a talented writer writes only about nature and birds and is not better known, but I will surely get my hands on some other books of his. Second, the cultural milieu that brings the reader to the opening scene (of the eagle actually killing its prey) builds up during the narration and is one of the main subjects of the book. We get an excursus through Marco Polo's travels, Vadim Gorbatov's art work, Andrew's dinosaur discoveries, David Edwards beautiful photographic images (by the way visit his site and enjoy the eagle and horseman pictures), practically into the author's mind. His references become our references and his dreams ours. One of the fascinating aspects of this book is the closeness even layman can achieve to the eagle hunting subject. Third, the book is travelogue or explorography (as the author puts it) and so a get along tale, that as always has the power of getting you to the last page with the

curiosity of what is coming up next. This work is enjoyable, mind and heart raising, didactic and cultural. Truly it can be offered as a gift to curious and encyclopedic friends.

This was a wonderful book. I have a fascination with Central Asia, Mongols, and falconry. This book has it all. Very entertaining read: the authors travel to the forbidding Altai Mtns of Asia to experience eagle hunting with those who know it best. A great adventure story & one I wish I could have participated in!

I don't hunt or fish or tramp around in the wilderness but, despite that, I was entranced by this book - couldn't put it down. To me, it's a story of how one person, in this case a brilliant and engaging writer, managed to achieve a dream he'd held since childhood. Bodio is such a fine (and funny!) storyteller that he makes one of the world's most exotic places accessible without making it a bit less exotic. Hunting with eagles in Mongolia doesn't have to be your dream for this book to be one you'll treasure, just like you didn't have to fish for trout to love "A River Runs Through It." I highly recommend this book.

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