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The Tree and American Birds both had origins that stemmed back to an event that had considerable influence in the publishing world, but they had very different gestation periods. The Tree was conceived and born over a time of scarcely more than five years, whereas American Birds was in the process of coming into being for a half century.

I began photographing birds when I was a school boy, and as I gained in proficiency I accumulated a large collection of black and white prints. In the 1930s I took a portfolio of these to a Boston publisher. The editor praised but refused them on grounds that the birds were not identifiable. He said they would have to be in color before he could consider publishing them. First color film recently on the market so I set about photographing birds in color. Returned years later with portfolio of color prints to same editor and was informed that to publish them would cost too much.

While photogrphing birds in color became interested in other subjects in the forests and fields in particular the smaller objects of nature such as lichens, grasses, flowers, and the bark of trees. My wife suggested a book on Thoreau because my pictures reminded her of his writing. Started reading Thoreau and carried his journals with me on expeditions to photograph birds. Gradually began to put together photographs in color and passages from Thoreau that complemented one another, finally producing a dummy of a book on Thoreau. Showed this to publishers in Boston and New York with negative results. they all rejected the idea as too provincial and expensive. But in habds of agent with no more success. Refused by Houghton-Mifflin, Oxford, Random House, Knopf, Sloane, Doubleday, Simon & Shuster, Scribners, and many others. Viking was interested provided the Book of the Month Club would support it but they too eventually turned it down.
Then with the help of the Beaumont Newhalls I was introduced to David Brower, Executive Director of the Sierra Club, who immediately liked the idea and was able to persuade the Sierra Club to publish it, provided $50,000 could be raised by grants and loans, as the second book of the Exhibit Format Series - the first in color.
Not only was the money raised but publication history was made

when In Wildness is the Preservation of the World with an introduction by Joseph Wood Krutch was published and became an instant success. After that publishing houses were less apophatic towards expensive, large format, color illustrated books on nature and the environment.

In Wildness published in 1962 , the centennial of Thoreau's death, led rapidly to other books of the same kind, but still my book on birds remained unpublished and unaccepted. I believe it was in 1966 after the Sierra Club had issued several more books in the exhibit format series and had accquired world remown for publishing innovation Brower received a letter from Perez Olindo, Director of the Kenya National Park System, asking him to consider a Sierra Club book on East African wildlife. Brower asked me how I felt about doing the photography and of course I immediately accepted. However, differences of opinion within the Sierra Club administration led to Brower's resignation and the African book died along with their publication program.

I kept the African book in mind and after E. P. Dutton became my publishe I broached the idea to John Macrae. He shook his head over the proposal as too difficult because of the large number of African books already on the market but he didn't reject it entirely. Then one day in 1969 he told me he had good news, that Peter Matthiessen was interested in doing a book on Africa, and would I be willing to collaborate with him. We met in Jack's office; were both enthusiastic and set 1970 as the year.

And so the African book which arose out of the Exhibit Format Series of the Sierra Club in 1966 came into being in 1972 a gestation time of six years. The American Birds book had its first tentative origins more than a half century ago, developed slowly through many vicisitudes and associations - one of which was Summer Island - until at last it saw the light of day this fall. It also is closely connected with the whole publication programs of the Sierra Club, Harper & Row, and E.P. Dutton and is the ancester of In Wildness, Summer Island, and a whole series of publications of lavishly illustrated books in color although it did not itself appear before its progeny.