



LEWIS THOMAS PRIZE

Honoring the Scientist as Poet

By feeding his curiosity about birds with meticulous fieldwork, open-mindedness, and creative thinking, Richard Prum has broken new ground in ornithology and far afield. His approach is as bold as his ideas: he has harnessed disparate disciplines to apply whatever methodology and expertise will best illuminate the issue at hand. His discoveries about the behavior, anatomy, and evolution of birds have spotlighted unanticipated truths of nature and shaken dogma.

In his book, *The Evolution of Beauty*, Dr. Prum argues that female birds manifest their aesthetic tastes in mate choice, selecting the males that they find most alluring. Female taste exerts a powerful force in evolution and is responsible for many of animals' most striking, exotic, and attractive characteristics.

With verve and wit, Dr. Prum delivers a wry account of the 150-year scientific quarrel about this idea, dissecting the sexist objections of Victorian critics and the arguments of modern researchers who contend that males' over-the-top traits must indicate strength and vitality. Dr. Prum transports readers to the rain forest of Suriname and other far-flung locations where he has performed research. His prose takes flight when he describes the appearance and behavior of birds.

Richard Prum vividly conveys the intricacy and beauty of nature, as well as the excitement of trying to understand it. His gift for bringing to life subjects as diverse as bowerbirds' decorating choices and scientists' intellectual wrangling makes him an exemplary recipient of the Lewis Thomas Prize.

PRESENTED TO

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FOR THE TRUSTEES OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY
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