

# AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

with

## JEANETTE LARSON



**You have an undergraduate degree in anthropology. When and how did you decide to then pursue your master's in library science and become a children's librarian?**

I loved studying anthropology. The degree offered a wide variety of topics to explore, so I often tell people I know a little bit about everything and not much about anything. While I enjoyed the courses, anthropology doesn't really prepare you for a job. Usually you have to go on and get the master's and PhD to teach and do fieldwork. After graduation I recognized that I needed a marketable skill and realized that I spent a lot of time in libraries and enjoyed doing research and reading. I decided to get the master's degree but really didn't think about being a children's librarian until I was working in a library and recognized how much I liked working with children and literature for young people. I think it is interesting that I was able to take a broad, general studies degree and turn it into a career. Anthropology actually proved to be a wonderful basis for library work, and I'm always thrilled when I realize that something I learned at the University of New Mexico has come in handy.

**You have written several books for librarians, but *Hummingbirds* is your first book for young readers. What made you decide to write a book for children?**

I have always enjoyed storytelling and like mythology and folklore. It's actually kind of a cliché that children's librarians want to write books for children. I rejected suggestions that I write a book for children mainly because I didn't really have a story I was burning to tell, and there are so many fabulous writers already. In 2003 I met Adrienne Yorinks and we became friends. I worked with her on *Quilt of States* (National Geographic, 2005), writing the part on Texas and finding and compiling the work of forty-nine other librarians. We wanted to write a book together but needed to find a subject we were both passionate about. When I came up with the idea to write about hummingbirds, it allowed me to combine my passion for the birds with storytelling and use my anthropology degree. Many of the authors I have met during my library career have encouraged me over the years to write for children, and now I finally have!

**What is the most interesting thing you learned while doing research for *Hummingbirds*?**

I guess I would have to say that the most interesting thing I learned was that these magnificent creatures only exist in the Americas. I, like most people, assumed they could be found in most places around the world. I'm also amazed by a lot of the details about them. For example, the bee hummingbird is the smallest bird in existence and weighs less than half a penny. At the other extreme for the species, the giant hummingbird is only about the weight of five pennies. Also, their magnificent colors don't come from pigmentation, but rather from the light



refracting through their feathers. This means that the colors can appear to change as the bird moves. Okay, that was really three “most interesting” things.



### Have you always been a birding enthusiast?

I’m careful to recognize that I am not really a birder, nor am I a bird expert. I’m more of a nature and animal enthusiast. Birds are all around us, even in cities, and I’ve always enjoyed them. They come in so many varieties and colors! About four years ago my husband and I moved to a new home near a small community lake. I love seeing the various birds, including a blue heron, that stop at the lake. We also put in a large hummingbird and butterfly garden and some bird feeders around our home. Like many people, I’ve been fascinated by hummingbirds for much of my life. They are so small and fly so quickly that they are elusive. I feel very lucky when I see one and even luckier when they come near me.

### Where would you like to travel in order to see hummingbirds?

I’m going to Jamaica in the fall and am determined to see the hummingbirds in Montego Bay. But I guess my true dream trip would be to Costa Rica. There are about twenty-eight species to be found in that country, and they are among the most beautiful of an already magnificent range of birds.

### Do you have any plans for a second children’s book?

My editor, Randi Rivers, and I just recently talked about my next book. I don’t want to divulge too much about the topic, but it will focus on an interesting and very ancient insect and include folklore about that creature. I’m also mulling over some other ideas.

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by Jeanette Larson

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# HUMMINGBIRDS



Hummingbirds are fascinating little creatures that have captured the imagination of people for thousands of years. Since they are only found in the Americas, the myths about this tiny bird originated from the peoples of North and South America.

Legends from these native cultures combined with scientific information compiled by Jeanette Larson and Adrienne Yorinks provide readers with a thorough understanding of the enigmatic species.

Bold and unique mixed-media quilts consolidate the worlds of fact and folklore on every page, as readers uncover the enchanting bird’s secrets.

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