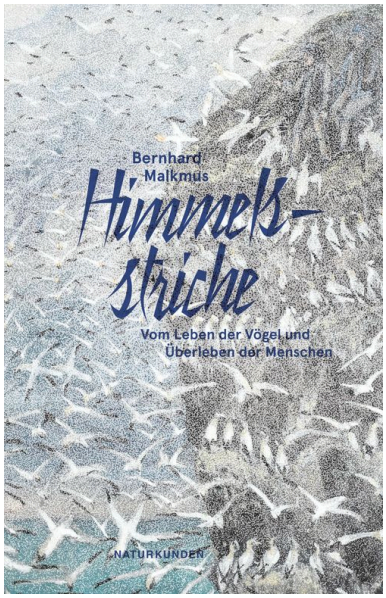


by Bernhard Malkmus
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Non-Fiction

Flight Lines: Of Avian and Human Homing Instincts

Himmelsstriche. Vom Leben der Vögel und Überleben der Menschen

review

A beautifully observed work of nature writing that combines memoir and cultural history, ‘Flight Lines’ follows the migratory paths of seabirds along the north-eastern coast of England and southern Scotland to explore what they reveal about the relationships between people, place and the natural world. Written by German scholar Bernhard Malkmus during his year living on England’s North Sea coast, this is an original meditation on attention, belonging and ecological loss.

Structured as a diary spanning the annual migration cycle of the Arctic tern, the book accompanies Malkmus as he walks the coastline from Northumberland towards Scotland, observing birds, meeting local residents and tracing the histories embedded in the landscape. Each encounter opens up a wider constellation of ideas: the legacy of industrialisation and deindustrialisation, the devastating impact of climate change and avian influenza, the cultural significance of seabirds and the ways in which human lives remain intertwined with the more-than-human world. Alongside close observations of kittiwakes, puffins, gannets and terns, Malkmus reflects on writers and artists including Nan Shepherd, Robert Macfarlane, Katrina Porteous and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, creating a rich tapestry in

which literature, ecology and local history continually illuminate one another.

‘Flight Lines’ evolves through patient acts of observation. The diary form allows ideas to accumulate gradually, mirroring the seasonal rhythms of bird migration while revealing how environmental catastrophe is experienced through dramatic events, but also through subtle changes in landscapes and wildlife. Malkmus writes as both participant and attentive outsider: a German living in Britain who approaches the region with affection, curiosity and quiet political awareness. His reflections never become overly personal, but his presence gives the book warmth and coherence, grounding its wider ethical questions in the realities of everyday encounters.

Malkmus’ elegant and precise prose places ornithological detail sits comfortably alongside literary criticism, philosophy and social history. The result is a thoughtful work that asks how we might learn to inhabit damaged landscapes with greater humility and responsibility.

Blending nature writing with cultural history and environmental inquiry, ‘Flight Lines’ introduces an important new voice to English-language readers. Its lyrical prose, profound sense of place and attentive exploration of the environmental challenges shaping the contemporary world will appeal to readers of Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris’s *The Lost Spells*, Kathleen Jamie’s *Surfacing* and Cal Flyn’s *Islands of Abandonment*.

Find out more:
https://www.matthes-seitz-berlin.de/book/himmelsstriche.html

press quotes

In descriptively exact, redolently literary language by turns exhilarated and elegiac, the author recounts his experience exploring the natural and, above all, avian habitats of Northumberland and the Scottish Borders. […] Intersecting with his mourning for animal fates is a political lament – the effort of a European outsider to reckon with the post-Thatcher world that he encounters – and a desire to do justice to forms of memory and community that still survive. An English translation doing equal justice to Malkmus's evocative voice is surely called for

Ian Cooper, Times Literary Supplement

[Flight Lines] is one of the most impressive literary works on nature written in the German language.

Josef Reichholf, Die WELT

Bernhard Malkmus is currently probably the most important literary voice in German warning against ecocide on a biospheric scale. He does so in an impressive lyrical register and a highly sensitive language, clear and transparent. In addition, he shows how the creation of such a language could make ethical action and political change possible […].

Jan Volker Röhnert, Faust-Kultur

about the author



Bernhard Malkmus is a writer, translator and professor of German and Environmental Humanities at the University of Oxford. He grew up in Bavaria and Lisbon and has taught at universities in

Germany, the US, and Britain. Before moving to Oxford, he lived and worked in Newcastle upon Tyne, and he regularly returns to the North-East and Scotland. His work as a scholar is dedicated to environmental ethics and nature aesthetics, and his work as a writer focuses on political essays, poetry, and nature writing. He has published widely in leading German-language literary journals such as Neue Rundschau, Akzente, Sinn und Form, and die horen. His previous publications include *Lynx* (2023) for the 'Naturkunden' series at Matthes & Seitz Berlin; he also edited a newly revised translation of Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard* (2022). *Himmelsstriche* was shortlisted for the W.G. Sebald Literature Prize in 2025.

Previous works: *Luchse*, Matthes & Seitz Berlin (2022); *The German Picaro and Modernity: Between Underdog and Shapeshifter*, Bloomsbury (2011); *Hertzmark: Kinnuis und andere verdichtete Namen*, Christian Thanhäuser (forthcoming).

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