



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 15, 2011

“The Big Year”: a Positive, Engaging Family Film

Kenny Bostick (Owen Wilson) is very proud of his “Big Year,” wherein he spotted 732 different species of birds — a record in birding history.

Naturally, other bird-watchers are trying to break such a coveted record, and Brad Harris (Jack Black) and Stu Preissler (Steve Martin) turn it into a fierce (and humorous) competition — at times even a contact sport.

Harris — gifted with the ability to recognize the species of any bird simply by its call — nevertheless does not have the financial means to be chasing his feathered friends across the globe; therefore, he must figure out an economical way to top Bostick's record.



Preissler, on the other hand, is fully capable of embarking on such a quest, at least financially. He has already accomplished a great deal in his life, having built a company from the ground up. Deciding to pursue the dream of his own Big Year, he relinquishes control of his company and embarks on his quest.

Meanwhile, like any competitive athlete, Bostick — not satisfied with his own record — is seeking to top it and secure a permanent world record in bird-watching, even if it means leaving behind his loving wife (much to her chagrin).

These three birder buddies have a lot of positive characteristics. They are passionate about a sport that essentially consists of enjoying nature, and they prove to be honest in their competition, though it takes a little time for them to get there. However, they also exemplify the dark side of competition, wherein activities that should be enjoyable and celebratory are transformed into something of an ugly nature.

For example, both Bostick and Harris are divorced, and the implication that it is because of their obsession with birding adds some depth to the film, serving as a caution that anything taken to excess can become negative.

Priessler and Bostick prove to be polar opposites. Priessler, though dedicated to his hobby, continues to recognize what is important in his life. His relationship with his wife is intact and happy, and appears to have a balanced give and take. She is happy to help him realize his dream, even if it means sacrificing some of their time together. During their goodbye, she tells him that she does not want to get in the way of his greatest passion, to which he replies, “Not my greatest passion.”

Meanwhile Bostick is obsessed with birding to such a degree that he is willing to put it above everything that's important — most notably his wife Jessica (Rosamund Pike). Thus, she has repeatedly voiced concerns about what her husband's obsession is costing their marriage. She herself is more focused on starting a family and in seeing her husband become more engaged in their relationship. That their relationship is strained is made clear on more than one occasion. For instance, when Bostick attempts to explain his motivation for beating his own record, he exclaims, “Nobody remembers who



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comes in second!" Jessica, all too familiar with that feeling, responds bitterly, "I know."

The *The Big Year* has a strong moral about the importance of nurturing family relationships and of properly prioritizing different areas of one's life in order not to (for instance) let hobbies become obsessions.

There are moments in the film when the men marvel at the wonders of the universe in such a way as to imply the existence of a higher power, though God Himself is rarely mentioned.

The movie may be particularly appealing to men, as it highlights different stages of their lives, and the varieties of crises to which they can relate. For instance, while Bostick is having difficulty balancing his own interests with those of his wife, Harris is struggling to please his ever-disgruntled father, and Preissler is growing increasingly disoriented by the rat race of the business world.

And while some might scoff at the notion of bird-watching as a competitive sport, the film offers an enjoyable insight into its wonder and allure.

Overall, *The Big Year* is characterized by an underlying warmth and appreciation for other living things in a way similar to *Marley & Me*, also directed by David Frankel. Offering a positive perspective for moviegoers, this family-friendly film's a definite good choice for all movie fans.



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