



Willodeen (Sep 2021)

Author: [Applegate, Katherine](#)

Ages 9-12 **Fiction**

Description: When the annual migration of hummingbirds, a source of local pride and income, dwindles and no one knows why, **Willodeen**, armed with a magical birthday gift, speaks up for the animals she loves and vows to uncover this mystery.

Book Appeal Terms: [Definition of Appeal Terms](#)

Genre: Fantasy fiction; Multiple perspectives

Themes: Green reads

Character: Courageous

Writing Style: Attention-grabbing; Spare

Min/Max Grade level: 3 - 7

Lexile: 610 **Accelerated Reader:** IL: MG, BL: 4.2, AR Pts: 4

Persistent link to this record (Permalink):

Booklist:

Grades 3-5 /* Starred Review */ You know you're in for a treat with an Applegate fantasy, but when she dreams up hummingbirds—tiny, winged bears that nest in bubbles—it's instantly catapulted into irresistible territory. For Willodeen, who happens to have a flightless hummingbird as a pet, her heart is far more occupied with the welfare of unlovable creatures, namely the widely detested screechers—a grumpy combo of skunk (odor), warthog (snout, tusks), beaver (tail), and porcupine (quills). This is, perhaps, because Willodeen herself is an outsider, preferring to spend her time alone, observing nature and helping the two women—older, but spitfires—who took her in after a terrible wildfire claimed the lives of her family. Two events force Willodeen out of her comfort zone and into the company of other townsfolk: (1) the steady, mysterious decline in hummingbird populations, and (2) the bounty placed on screechers, as a way

to rid Perchance of their smelly presence. Thus, the 11-year-old comes to find her first friend, a baby screecher in need of a home, and her voice when it matters most. Applegate's gentle yet honest tale mixes magic with very real environmental messaging, both warning of human-caused harm and pointing to nature's resilience and interconnectedness. Perchance feels charmingly antiquated without being idyllic, and Applegate empowers her young characters by not only granting them courage but also ensuring they earn the respect of their elders. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Adored and acclaimed, Applegate has been given a 750k first print run for this release. That's a lot of hummingbears! -- Julia Smith (Reviewed 7/1/2021) (Booklist, vol 117, number 21, p87)

School Library Journal:

Gr 3–7—Applegate's latest fantasy is a simple but beautiful story about humans' relationship with the natural world. Orphaned Willodeen has never quite fit in with her peers. She loves all animals, but especially the widely despised screecher: a smelly creature with tusks, a snout, tails, and quills. She is happy keeping to herself until the screechers begin to disappear, mainly due to the bounty the town of Perchance has placed on them. The rest of the town is focused on the disappearance of the hummingbears, winged bears responsible for the tourist draw to Perchance. After witnessing the killing of an old screecher, Willowdeen's new friend Connor carves her one that is magically brought to life through her tears. Determined to save this last screecher, Willodeen finds the connection between the screechers and hummingbears and stands up for them at a town meeting. Red-haired Willowdeen is cued as white. Connor has brown skin. VERDICT A sweet fantasy about standing up for what you believe in. Hand to all young environmentalists.—Katharine Gatcomb, Nashua P.L., NH --Katharine Gatcomb (Reviewed 10/01/2021) (School Library Journal, vol 67, issue 10, p81)

Publishers Weekly:

/* Starred Review */ Employing flawlessly simple, candid prose that belies deeper messages, Newbery Medalist Applegate again considers the complex relationship between humans and the natural world. Before Willowdeen's family died in the Great

September Fire when she was just six, her father taught her to love and respect animals, especially the most unlovable. Now, Willodeen's kind but occasionally cantankerous guardians don't seem to mind when the 10-year-old skips school to look for screechers. The sharp-toothed, foul-smelling animals are hated—and hunted—by Perchance's townspeople, who prefer sweet-faced, tourist-garnering hummingbears. Lately, though, both species have been disappearing. After Willodeen witnesses the killing of an elderly screecher, new friend Connor crafts one for her birthday that magically comes to life. Now, Willodeen must overcome her aversion to people to protect it while trying to solve the mystery of the animals' disappearance. Via imaginative depictions, including interspersed chapters from the screecher's point of view, Applegate brings an intimate cast of default-white human characters and scene-stealing mythical ones to life. Fiercely protective Willodeen is easy to champion, and her belief that "nature knows more than we do" is a message worth sharing. Ages 8–12. Agent: Elena Giovinazzo, Pippin Properties. (Sept.) --Staff (Reviewed 07/12/2021) (Publishers Weekly, vol 268, issue 28, p)

Kirkus:

An orphan loner's small town faces a hard future after it unwittingly disrupts a natural cycle. Willodeen is lucky that elderly retired thespians Mae and Birdie took her in after the wildfire that killed her parents and brother, not only because they're a loving couple, but because they let her roam the woods in search of increasingly rare screechers—creatures so vile-tempered and stinky that the village elders of Perchance have put a bounty on them. The elders have other worries, though: The migratory hummingbears that have long nested in the area, drawing tourists to the lucrative annual Autumn Faire, have likewise nearly vanished. Could there be a connection? If there is, Willodeen is just the person to find it—but who would believe her? Applegate's characters speak in pronouncements about life and nature that sometimes seem to address readers more than other characters, but the winsome illustrations lighten the thematic load. Screechers appear much like comically fierce warthogs and hummingbears, as small teddies with wings. Applegate traces a burgeoning friendship between her traumatized protagonist and Connor, a young artist who turns found

materials into small animals so realistic that one actually comes to life. In the end, the townsfolk do listen and pitch in to make amends. Red-haired, gray-eyed Willodeen is cued as White; Connor has brown skin, and other human characters read as White by default. The young folk and (of course) the animals are engagingly wrought in this tale with a strong ecological message. (Eco-fantasy. 8-12) (Kirkus Reviews, August 15, 2021)