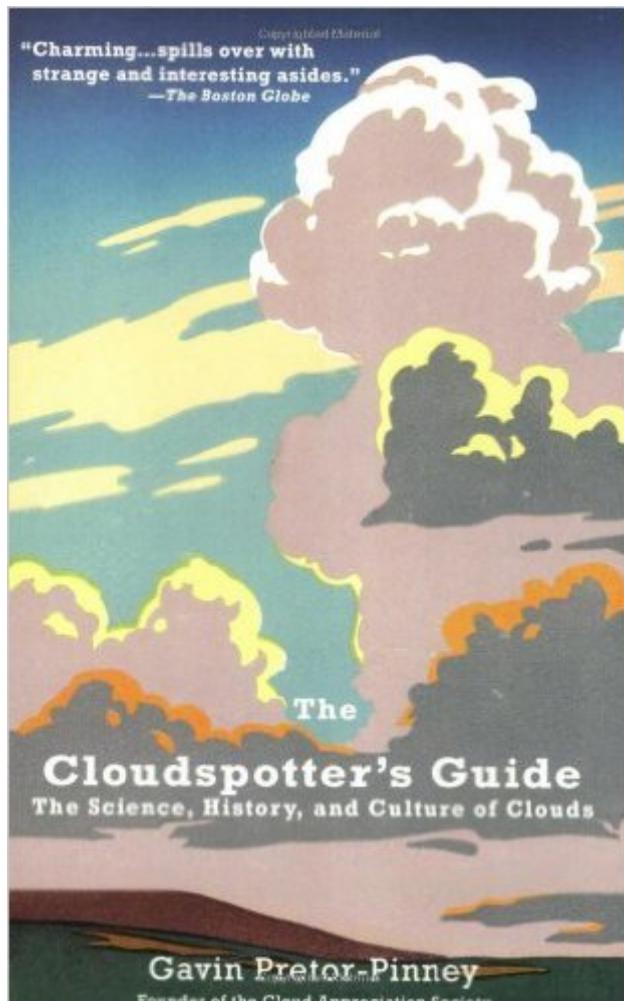


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# The Cloudspotter's Guide: The Science, History, And Culture Of Clouds



## Synopsis

Now in paperback: the runaway British bestseller that has cloudspotters everywhere looking up. Where do clouds come from? Why do they look the way they do? And why have they captured the imagination of timeless artists, Romantic poets, and every kid who's ever held a crayon? Veteran journalist and lifelong sky watcher Gavin Pretor-Pinney reveals everything there is to know about clouds, from history and science to art and pop culture. Cumulus, nimbostratus, and the dramatic and surfable Morning Glory cloud are just a few of the varieties explored in this smart, witty, and eclectic tour through the skies. Illustrated with striking photographs (including a new section in full-color) and line drawings featuring everything from classical paintings to lava lamps, *The Cloudspotter's Guide* will have enthusiasts, weather watchers, and the just plain curious floating on cloud nine.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

We get a lot of clouds in Michigan. You know, the Great Lakes and all. Sometimes, the blue sky people come here and find our skies depressing. But I like the clouds in all their varieties. In fact, when I am forced into a morning drive to the east with the Sun directly in my eyes, I am grateful when it disappears behind a cloud. Over the years I have seen some wonderful things. I remember as a child seeing a rainbow in a circle around the Sun and being amazed by it and looking up why it was there. I didn't understand all the technical terms, but remember that it talked about ice crystals refracting the light. Even so, I only learned about the clouds in the most rudimentary way. Storm clouds are always amazing to see. I have even seen a few tornadoes and some amazing skies

when I lived in Queensland, Australia for two years. There was a cyclone when I was there and that was literally a breath taking experience. The stinging rain comes sideways and it is hard to breath facing into the wind. I could even lean all my weight back into the wind and with my arms outstretched, it easily held me up. One of the wonderful aspects of this book is the way the author shares his love of the beauties in the least dramatic types in a way that enthuses us to go and look for them on our own. Gavin Pretor-Pinney is the founder of the Cloud Appreciation Society and if you love pictures of clouds I can't recommend his website strongly enough. Really, they are amazing in their variety, drama, and beauty. This book has thirteen chapters. The first ten take us through the ten main cloud types from the low cumulous up to the cirrostratus. Before the first chapter there is a handy chart of these clouds and their common altitudes that can guide you to the relevant chapter in the book.

"Blue skies, smiling at me," goes the Irving Berlin song, "Nothing but blue skies do I see." Berlin thought that was a good thing, but Gavin Pretor-Pinney would not. For him, clouds are there to be enjoyed, and they make that blue more beautiful by its being in the background. He does not feel there is anything depressing about having "a cloud on the horizon" and he sees no reason that we should link clouds with catastrophe, as in "clouds of doom", or with ill-will as in "clouds of suspicion". He feels clouds are underappreciated, and so a couple of years ago, he founded the Cloud Appreciation Society, complete with badges. As he says, "Of course, an organization only exists when it has a website," and indeed the CAS has one, full of photographs and poems by members, a picture of the Cloud of the Month, and chat rooms, with this stated purpose: "If you've got something to tell us, we'd love to hear it. But only if it is about clouds. Otherwise we're not interested." Pretor-Pinney would like us all to be cloudspotters, and has produced *\_The Cloudspotter's Guide: The Science, History, and Culture of Clouds\_* (Perigee), a witty and informative volume for those who want to take an educated view of his favorite subject. He emphatically agrees with John Constable, who could paint clouds like no one else: "We see nothing truly until we understand it." The book cannot fail in its mission of increasing both understanding and seeing. We start understanding things when we can categorize them, and over the years, observers learned there were differences in cloud types and they attached names to them. The first person to take on this task did not do so until the nineteenth century.

Gavin Pretor-Pinner deserves praise for taking something so obvious as clouds, and writing a whole book. We tend to take the fluffy white (or bleak grey ..... ) objects for granted, and many know a little

about what they are composed of, and where they come from. Mr P-P is obviously something of an expert in his field, and a real enthusiast, and has caused my thoughts to be "amongst the clouds", and in that the book has achieved some success. However, can I still name the 10 cloud types, and identify them? That is a different matter. After a general introduction, there are chapters on each of the 10 (main) cloud types. In previous eras, clouds were seen to portend the weather. In the days of the 24-hour availability of detailed meteorological forecasts, that is now hard to believe. Knowledge of cloud formations is becoming something that we do not need to know. There are detailed explanations of weather fronts, (cold front, warm front and what used to be known as occluded fronts). However, there are no weather maps as a pictorial guide, with isobars. That would have been helpful. Generally, I liked the book more as I progressed, but the subject matter is not 'a story'. Gavin writes better when the detail is linked to little anecdotes, and he has a wry sense of humour, more to make the reader weakly smile than laugh. There are informative matters of detail, so that any reader will come away with items they never knew. The style brings life to the sometimes dry subject matter of condensed water vapour, which at times left me reeling with formation details and Latin names of the sub-species of clouds. I found that some detail of the basic cloud types merged into each other, much as a blanket of Cirrostratus.

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