

## Owen Wilson, Steve Martin, Jack Black Flock Up in 'The Big Year'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 15, 2011 - 1:01am

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “The Big Year” is advertised as a comedy. The subject is bird watching, or as the new film likes to express the proper term, “birding.” It stars comic legend Steve Martin, and funnymen Jack Black and Owen Wilson. It is both not funny and is ACTUALLY, seriously about birding. Time to fly away.

“The Big Year” amazes in so many ways, all of which are negative. It wastes a monumental amount of talent. Besides Martin, Black and Wilson, it includes Oscar winners Anjelica Huston and Dianne Wiest, indie film favorites Tim Blake Nelson and Brian Dennehy, plus top TV personalities Rashida Jones, Joel McHale and Jim Parsons. If this much waste was spewed by a factory, there would be million dollar fines from the E.P.A.

Owen Wilson plays Kenny Bostick, the top bird watcher in the United States (apparently this exists. USA! USA!). In one year, called a “Big Year,” he sighted 732 different types of birds. The arouses the cult of birding, which includes Brad (Jack Black) and retiring super-mogul Stu (Steve Martin). They both set out to do their own Big Year, and soon develop a friendship that will bond together to defeat the rival Bostick.



Steve Martin as Stu, Jack Black as Brad and Owen Wilson as Kenny in 'The Big Year'  
Photo credit: Murray Close for © Twentieth Century Fox

There is much that is sacrificed in pursue of the birds. Stu is leaving behind an important business deal, Brad has a father (Brian Dennehy) that will never understand him and Kenny has a wife that wants to get pregnant. But the birding obsession comes first, aided by charter boat captain Annie Auklet (Anjelica Huston), fellow birder Fuchs (Tim Blake Nelson), the ever-present Ellie (Rashida Jones) and an on-line blogger name Ichabod "Crane" (Jim Parsons).

It's hard to figure out why this film was made in the first place, and with this cast. Were they not allowed to look at the script? Were they all contractually obligated? All of them? This would be another instance of the "Gene Siskel Rule," where a filmed lunch with the actors would be more interesting than the film itself. What few laughs there are in this "comedy," immediately are muted by the fact that this film takes birding seriously. Nothing against birding, but unless this about a Terry-Thomas like fop and makes a statement about the British class structure, it doesn't work as a basis for hilarity. And this film keeps proving it.

Jack Black and Owen Wilson, once young punks rebelling against the cookie cutter of Hollywood dreck, dive into their tired characters, paychecks first. Wilson can barely get enough energy to produce one of his classic smirks, his attitude says the entire time, 'when is this over?' Black is reduced to domestic sappiness as the loving son who wants attention from dying Dad. I need a large polo mallet.

The veterans don't fare any better. Steve Martin is in full "Father of the Bride" mode, and not in a good way. As a long-time admirer of the "Wild and Crazy Guy," his film roles of late are distressing his overall legacy. He's comfortable in Stu's shoes, but who wouldn't be? He's rich as hell. The women are a little better. Anjelica Huston is briny enough as a salty seaman, Dianne Wiest is properly supporting as Brad's mother and JoBeth Williams (as Stu's wife) gets to admire a fake backdrop of Paris. Oscars nominations for everyone!



Jack Black and Rashida Jones as Ellie in 'The Big Year'  
Photo credit: Murray Close for © Twentieth Century Fox

On the surface, there seems to be nothing wrong with celebrating this odd passion. This is based on a book by Mark Obmascik and the screenplay is by Howard Franklin. The book is probably a smart-guy tome about doing something strange like birding, but the script tries desperately to turn it into a marketable comedy. Marketable is the key word, but as has been proved time and time again, just plugging in certain actors is not enough to overcome the whisper-soft narrative of a lackluster subject.

The ending is so much of a shrug of the shoulders, the temptation is to give it away. It is the capper to this being-and-nothingness exercise, not in a zen way of watching birds, but in the diminishing way of the realizing that the word "big" should be nowhere near the title.

*"The Big Year" opens everywhere October 14th. Featuring Jack Black, Owen Wilson, Steve Martin, Rashida Jones, Tim Blake Nelson, JoBeth Williams, Dianne Wiest, Brian Dennehy, Anjelica Huston and Jim Parsons. Screenplay by Howard Franklin. Directed by David Frankel. Rated "PG"*



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