

The Blue Jay Bookshelf

"WINGS IN THE WIND"

By ANNE MERRILL, Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1954

Review by MARGARET BELCHER

A column of Anne Merrill's that appeared every Saturday morning for ten years in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* provides the inspiration and title for her book *Wings in the Wind*. R. A. Farquharson, who was editor of the *Globe and Mail* when the column began, comments on how it "was tossed into the cold columns of type and left to sink or soar: and how well the wings have fared in the wind ever since!" The qualities that made that feature a must in a crowded Saturday paper insure the popularity of Anne Merrill's book with the general reading public. For one thing, the writer is obviously interested in people as well as in birds. Her style is deliberately popular rather than scientific. In this way, she hopes to encourage even those who have never thought about the birds around them to enter a "realm of magic" which she has known from childhood.

In appealing to the general reader, Anne Merrill writes of the heralds of spring and of the flower birds, of voices of the marsh and wings over the water, of birds that ride the wind, and last of all, of birds that brave the snow. At first, her observations about them seem deceptively simple. She disarms any reader who feels that he himself knows nothing about birds by proceeding from the familiar to the less familiar. She takes the theme, "Just turn and look out of your own window", and reminds us that "there is no lovelier bird than the robin — a wild bird at our very door". From there she branches out to give all kinds of interesting bits of information, much of which will be digested enthusiastically by even the more experienced bird watcher.

In making her observations, Anne Merrill is careful not to discourage the reader by a technical vocabulary. In case you should find a name like Semipalmated Plover rather forbidding, she admits herself to calling the bird Little Killdeer "when no scientists are listening in". Actually, of course, Miss Merrill does not scorn the scientists or their contributions to knowledge, but she is

anxious that the man on the street should feel that he has a very real place in bird study. Bird lore as Anne Merrill gathers it comes first from observations made by herself or others who know her through her column. The experts are introduced only to supplement or confirm these observations, and the names of eminent ornithologists like Forbrush, F. H. Kortright, J. Dewey Soper, P. A. Taverner, slip into the text as casually as friends' names in a conversation. They have to share the honours with "a woman on Ward's Island who reported that she saw..."

This conversational approach to the reader is the strength of the book, although the style sometimes seems strained when Anne Merrill is too brightly anxious on behalf of the birds "to win friends and influence people". For the most part, however, what she writes has the virtues of simplicity and directness and with these a certain colour that comes from the capacity for apt description. Anne Merrill is also sensitive to the poetry of nature, and there are telling imaginative phrases in which she captures the spirit of "wild little warblers" with "restless wings and lispings notes", etc. After reading the book, you know you would have enjoyed having Anne Merrill's column at your breakfast table every Saturday morning.

SASKATCHEWAN TREE FARMS

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improvement of our farm forests. The woodlot owner who practices good forest management will receive both financial and aesthetic benefits much greater than he can envision today.

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