

## The Blue Jay Bookshelf

**THOREAU ON BIRDS.** Ed. by Helen Cruickshank. 1964. McGraw-Hill, New York, Toronto, London, 331 pp. \$7.95

Usually a reviewer examines a book for content, organization and language. In all respects this book is deserving of a high score. Helen Cruickshank is an estimable writer and is eminently qualified by ability, judgment and experience for a task of this importance and proportion. This is a book for nature lovers and other intelligent people. It is not for the run-of-the-mine reader who reads to keep from thinking.

In the introduction, Mrs. Cruickshank has given a brief biography of Thoreau and has set forth many of his strange ideas. Thoreau, if living today, would be excellent copy for inquiring reporters. In his speech at the Harvard Commencement he declared that the seventh should be man's day of toil and the other six his Sabbath of the affections and the soul. This arrangement would have appeared most impractical, of course, in a rural community like Concord where seeding and harvest required immediate action in their seasons. Thoreau, however, earned his living by working a month or, at most, six weeks in the year and spent the rest of the time in observation, thought and writing. At another time, he remarked that the labourer was not recompensed by his employer but by his labour. This would not be taken very seriously by the labour unions today! His ideas were quite often impractical, except those on conservation. When commenting on Thoreau's philosophy of life, one writer remarked that its unreality was its validity. It was not surprising that Thoreau has been quoted oftener than any other writer of English prose except Shakespeare.

The author has composed most of her material in *Thoreau on birds* from *Walden*, *The Journal*, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* and *The Maine Woods*. Thoreau's bird watching was casual but thorough. He so disciplined himself that he could remain silent and still for long periods. At the end of his stay at Walden he had tamed the wild birds of the area. Little birds would alight on his shoulder and hop down to eat from his hand. One of his friends remarked that you had

to see it to believe it. He loved all birds. The eagles, hawks and owls fascinated him. "I rejoice that there are owls. Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for man," he said.

*The Journal* was one of Thoreau's most important works. The author has allotted 165 pages to "Some Species of Birds from Thoreau's Journal." This section is exceedingly interesting. Throughout this part of the book Mrs. Cruickshank has added her own bright and informative commentaries complementing Thoreau's excerpts. Thoreau's Concord bird list (150 species) and that of the Maine woods appear later in the book.

Thoreau initiated the most complete study ever made of any area of the United States. It is not surprising that Concord today has one of the most active groups of bird watchers in the country. Thoreau was the king of nature lovers and his spirit still reigns. Nature lovers everywhere are deeply indebted to Mrs. Cruickshank for this splendid book on him.—*John Campbell, Regina.*

**CATS OF THE WORLD.** By Armand Dennis. 1964. Constable and Co. Ltd., London. 119 pp. Illus. \$7.10.

This is the first in the Constable World Wild Life series published under the sponsorship of the World Wild Life fund, which is attempting to protect some of the rarer species and those approaching extinction. This book gives a world wide coverage to the cat family and gives the reader a wider view of these animals, showing how some of its members are in a very precarious position. It also shows how little we know of this large group, for of thirty-six members of the cat family only seven have been photographed in the wild, and six have no known specimen or photograph from which an illustration could be made. For these latter the author has had to rely on drawings made from descriptions.

Armand Dennis is very well known as a naturalist, particularly outside North America, and it was mainly due his efforts that films on wild life became very popular in Europe. He is best known for his work on African animals, the lion in particular. His

well written book, with its carefully selected photographs, gives a comprehensive list and description of each species as well as their present range and status. His style is easy to read; it contains much of interest to specialists and general reader alike. Stories of lions, tigers, snow leopards and other cats keep the reader entertained, while many of the detailed descriptions teach more about the cat family. For any one who is interested in conservation in general or cats in particular this book is well worth its price.—Tom White, Regina.

**The widespread pollution of soil, water and living things by toxic chemicals used in insect control programmes: an introduction to the subject through direct quotations from published reports. Compiled by M. T. Myres. September, 1964. 54 pp. +i-ii, mimeo. (Available free of charge from: The Department of Biology, University of Alberta at Calgary, Calgary, Alberta).**

This is a series of abstracts, 164 quotations from the existing published literature, arranged in chronological order and divided into six sections, and designed to be read from beginning to end as a book. Try it . . . if you start reading it, you won't be able to stop. But after reading it you will certainly wish that you could do something about this space-age problem. There is at least one thing that can be done: get a copy of this bulletin, read it, then pass it along to anyone else you know who can read and think. The author, excuse me, compiler has been careful to omit any personal opinions, but occasionally his biases show, e.g., in the following statement from the introductions: ". . . I have not been concerned with negative evidence but with positive evidence—actual incidents in all their scandalizing details." Some alarming details: "The application of aldrin over some 31,000 acres in southeastern and southwestern Michigan in the fall of 1959 caused a loss of 20,000 vertebrates . . ." "There was an unprecedented drop in the number of pairs of Golden Eagles rearing their young in the Western Highlands of Scotland between 1961-63 . . . The authors conclude that the decline is attributable mainly to . . . residues of chlorinated hydrocarbons, particularly dieldrin, in the adult birds and their eggs." ". . . 4 clutches of 24 scaup eggs were collected near Yellow-

knife, N.W.T. . . . all clutches of eggs contained insecticide residues . . . more DDT and metabolites than any duck collected . . ." And on and on, including reports, especially alarming, on declines of birds of prey, which seem less resistant to pesticide residues than other vertebrates, in England, Holland, and Israel! An American Ornithologists' Union Committee recently stated: "It is the belief of your committee that much evidence indicates that certain, if not all, raptors are faced with a menace that could bring about their extermination."

One can't resist quoting again from Myres' introduction:

"It will also be a good thing if public understanding is increased. As the examples from Britain particularly show, the general public (urban as well as rural) has a great part to play by reporting kills, or other evidence of adverse effects of biocide applications, to the appropriate wildlife, fishery or university department. Research workers cannot be everywhere at once, and many natural phenomena (and unnatural ones such as the ones we are concerned with here) go unrecorded unless those who discover them let those who need to know learn about them. At the more sophisticated level local natural history societies in other parts of the world have conducted elaborate censuses of carefully chosen areas to detect changes in animal populations from year to year, and through nest record schemes have provided evidence which helps the authorities to detect changes in reproductive abilities and behaviour in commoner birds. They should do so in Canada too, for it is their responsibility and they have a really important role to play by doing so."

If you have read all of the reviews of *Silent Spring* but not the book (by the late Rachel Carson) do so now. If you haven't read any reviews, find a copy of the *Blue Jay* for December, 1962, and peruse the excellent review by Dr. R. L. Edwards. Or if you think we're giving this too much emphasis, see the recent timely article by Dr. F. G. Cooch, Canad. Wildl. Service, in the November-December 1964 issue of *Canadian Audubon*: "Current developments in the biocide-wildlife field." If you don't have access to a copy, write for a reprint to the author, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa.—R. W. Nero, Regina.