

# The Blue Jay Bookshelf

**BIRDS OF THE NORTHERN FOREST.** Paintings by J. Fenwick Lansdowne; text by John A. Livingston. 1966. McClelland and Stewart, Toronto. 247 pp. \$20.00 (Canadian).

Canadians may indeed be proud of the artist and author who have combined to produce one of the most beautiful bird books ever printed. This is not a book for bird identification, but a book for pleasure. Lansdowne is now a world-famous painter of birds, and his paintings have appeared in many popular publications. The book contains full-page color portraits of 56 species typical of the coniferous areas of Canada. These paintings have the accurate detail of those by Fuertes, Brooks, Peterson or Crosby, with a flourish rather reminiscent of Audubon.

The accompanying text by Jack Livingston is not the insipid patter that sometimes spoils a book that is centred around good illustrations. Instead, much informative material is presented in a lively style, explaining conservation in its truest sense, showing the need for predators and even for fire and flooding in nature's scheme of things.

This book is one that will be kept and treasured for generations. If you need the ultimate in a special gift item, or plan to indulge yourself in some luxury article, then this is a "best buy".—*C. Stuart Houston, Saskatoon.*

**THE GRIZZLY BEAR: Portraits from life.** By Bessie and Edgar Haynes. 1966. Univ. of Oklahoma Press. 386 pp. Black-and-white illustrations. \$5.00 (American).

Bessie and Edgar Haynes became interested in grizzly bears when visiting Yellowstone National Park, and when they retired, they collected various anecdotes and extracts which have been published in book form.

The first extract is from the diary of Henry Kelsey, whose first published description of the grizzly while in

Saskatchewan was not generally known until recently. We read from the journals of the great explorers and follow their adventures when first coming across this giant bear. There are other reminiscences from mountain men and pioneers who have contributed much to our knowledge of North American wild life. The fearsome charges of grizzlies, with their attacks upon unwary travellers, to battles in stockades with Texas long-horn bulls before Mexican rancheros, all recall the ferocity and cunning of the species. Other stories show how ranchers had some justification for protecting their cattle from its predations. However, the conservationist will be saddened by the way that hunting has destroyed the grizzly over much of its original range, and how in areas where these bears were once common, they were last seen in the 1920's. As the reader proceeds through the many stories the character of the grizzly becomes clearer, and there is much to be learned of its natural history in the extracts which have been included.—*Tom White, Regina.*

**ALEXANDER WILSON: Wanderer in the Wilderness.** By Robert Plate. 1966. David McKay Co., New York. 215 pp. Black-and-white illustrations. \$4.50 (American).

Alexander Wilson is known as the father of United States ornithology and Robert Plate's book gives a general history of Wilson's life. Wilson was a Scottish weaver who had some education at a time when it was not universal and had established a Scottish literary reputation at the same time as Robert Burns. He wrote a satire attacking the local establishment, together with other radical writings. The authorities were alarmed by the French Revolution, and when they proved that Wilson had committed extortion and had strong radical views, they sporadically jailed him until he migrated to the United States at the age of 28 in 1794.

Wilson first became a school teacher and at that time developed a more detailed interest in ornithology. He began to draw birds and was typical of the 19th century artist who was frequently living from hand to mouth and looking for a patron who would support him. This he found in Samuel Badford, who made him editor of an encyclopaedia and also promised to publish Wilson's book "Ornithology." With a good salary and his life's object known, Wilson travelled over New England and the southern states studying birds and selling subscriptions for his books, and after a very difficult time, printed a series of nine volumes containing most of the known birds of North America, and including some species for the first time. Reference is made to his meeting with Audubon, Ord and Jefferson, and light is thrown upon these early naturalists.

The narrative is somewhat syrupy, though the general story, with its illustrations, tells us a little more of natural history in the United States in the early part of the 19th century.—*Tom White, Regina.*

## BIRD BEHAVIOUR

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BIRDS: An interpretation of bird behavior.** By Harold E. Burtt. 1967. The Macmillan Company, New York. 242 pp. (including 10 full-page illustrations by Peter Arnell). \$7.25.

This book should be helpful in getting people to look at birds to see what they are doing, an aspect of natural history that has long intrigued naturalists. Professor Burtt was formerly chairman of the Psychology Department at Ohio State University, a post he held for 20 years. The subject is basically well-covered in 10 chapters on "bird psychology", "sensations and perceptions", "major drives and motives", "instinctive behavior", "migration, learning, "social behavior", "communication, "home and family life", and "personality and intelligence." Lest some of these imposing titles scare off the new naturalist, bear in mind, as the publisher points

out, that "everyone, from teen-agers to those older citizens who do *not* wish to arise and hear the lark greet the dawn, will enjoy the author's highly readable anecdotes and sprightly style."

Oddly, no reference is made to works by Konrad Lorenz, whose famed *King Solomon's Ring* will be familiar to many readers, and who has provided considerable impetus to bird behaviour studies. E. A. Armstrong is also not listed in the sources cited in the appendix (see next review). On the other hand, the late Professor Arthur A. Allen's *The Book of Bird Life* is listed as a reference for seven different chapters. Glancing through the book, I was surprised to see a number of misleading statements that suggest the author has not kept abreast of recent ornithological publications. Interesting anecdotes notwithstanding, it is no longer a matter of controversy whether vultures can smell their prey (they can). Few evolutionists will agree with the statement in respect to the origin of birds, that "those reptiles with enough feathers to get them off the ground were more likely to survive, and this characteristic was passed along to the offspring", or with the following explanation of certain specializations: "Birds that dove into the water after fish were more likely to have adequate nourishment and their offspring would follow suit."

I think that it is unfortunate the author didn't have some ornithologist or good bird-watcher check the spelling of the common names in the text. This, however, one can forgive; but not the statement, egregiously in error, that a grebe "gets the young one on its back, swims out to deep water and submerges so that the juvenile will have to swim." Oversimplification, presumably stemming from a desire to make the book more readable, has led to such comments as "hybridizing . . . it is not too desirable genetically." Having watched Red-winged Blackbirds for many years I feel qualified to question the statement that the "male may carry a bit of

nesting material around conspicuously" during the courtship phase. Frequent comments on the relationship between human and bird behavior enliven the text but these psychological discussions were sometimes inept and distracting.

Dr. Burt, who took up bird-watching as a hobby after he retired, should know that few will agree with him that ducks when feeding "put the front half of their body underwater and leave the other half sticking grotesquely in the air." That is bad psychology.

**BIRD DISPLAY AND BEHAVIOUR: An introduction to the study of bird psychology.** By Edward A. Armstrong. 1965. Dover Publications, Incorporated, New York. 431 pp. 32 plates and frontispiece. 30 line drawings. \$2.50 (paperbound).

It is a pleasure to recommend this fine book, recently reprinted with a new preface by the author. The original work was first published in 1942 as *Bird display*, but the present edition has been greatly revised and enlarged and is well worth the money even if you have the earlier edition. The preface to this edition is an extremely pithy statement of recent progress in animal behaviour and particularly bird behaviour; in it, the author shows that the work done by some early naturalists is similar to studies being carried out today by "ethologists". "Instead of harbouring preconceptions based, sometimes naïvely, on introspective premises, the ethologist, starting from the observed and recorded movements, utterances, colour changes and the like of the creature being studied, makes inferences in regard to the underlying mechanisms and their organization. Since the nature of few of the phenomena studied is adequately known, this involves the use of an interim descriptive terminology. Because of this, ambiguities and differences of opinion occur. They indicate the fluid nature of the conceptual field in this

science." The author, one of several British men-of-the-cloth who have attained international eminence as astute observers, is careful to point out that although it may be useful to substitute terms with more restricted meaning, e.g., "motivation" for "emotion", "it should be realized that a terminology drained of the connotations of introspective experience may lead to a too ready acceptance of presuppositions concerning the mechanistic character of behaviour."

The book begins with a discussion of the "ceremonial of the Gannet" then goes on to "the psychological basis of nest-building", "courtship feeding", "ceremonial gaping", and the "comparative study of display". In seventeen additional chapters such diverse topics as "the function of emotion in behaviour", "greeting, invitational and nest-relief ceremonies", "the dances of birds and men", "dominance and territory" and "the significance of display" are covered. This vast amount of material is carefully documented by reference to a bibliography of 38 pages comprising more than 1000 works. What is particularly valuable is the comparison made with the behaviour of other animals throughout the book. Although more of a reference book than a story book this book invites reading. I can open it to practically any page and become immersed at once, and come away enlightened and entertained. There is a wealth of information in this book about what birds do; if you already enjoy birds you ought to find this book a useful addition to your library. In the words of the author: "Birds still occupy much attention, not least because they are easily observable and expressive. We may anticipate steady progress in this field, and it is to be expected that constructive synthesis combined with the accepted analytical methods of investigation, avoiding gratuitously mechanistic assumptions may contribute to a more adequate and passionate appreciation not only of animal behaviour but of the human condition."

**A COMPARATIVE LIFE-HISTORY STUDY OF FOUR SPECIES OF WOODPECKERS.** By Louise de Kiriline Lawrence. 1967. Ornithological Monographs No. 5, The American Ornithologists' Union. Lawrence, Kansas. 156 pp., 33 figs., 15 tables. \$3.75 (\$3.00 to A.O.U. members).

No doubt a number of readers will recognize Mrs. Lawrence as the author of some fine nature writing, as well as an outstanding report on the Red-eyed Vireo (*Can. Field-Nat.*, 67:47-77). In either case, we have come to expect excellence in connection with her name, both as an observer and as a writer. She has not let us down in this most recent work, a scientific report on the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Hairy Woodpecker, and Downy Woodpecker. To use the author's words, "This investigation into the behavior of wild woodpeckers concentrates on their activities, the meaning and derivation of their movements, and the relation of these to the functions of the birds not only as a group, but more particularly as individuals subjected to various changeable situations." In recent years it has become increasingly clear that even the most ordinary species are worthy of study, often yielding results of significance beyond the understanding of the species involved. As a consequence, it is now possible to read lengthy reports about some fairly familiar, but as it turns out, little-known birds. The woodpeckers are a good example, and readers who have watched the antics of any of the four species studied by Mrs. Lawrence will enjoy following the course of her studies. We have here the distilled results of seven years of intensive observations, in all some 800 hours of solid field work. This was possible owing to the location of the author's home in the midst of choice woodpecker habitat at Pimisi Bay, Ontario. The observer who can afford to spend long hours afield studying his subjects is likely to be well rewarded: ". . . it seems to me that the keys to accurate interpretations of bird behavior are

seldom extracted from disconnected samples of activities, but are found secreted deeply within sequences of events whose correlations may be lost with missed installments. Time and patience are surprisingly reliable allies in providing the answers to many insoluble problems."

The topics covered in this study are: "movement, displays, and means of communication", "inauguration of the breeding cycle", "role of the territory", "pairing", "excavation period", "egg-laying and incubation periods", "nestling period", and the "post-nesting period." The author handles this material with clarity and simplicity, but without sacrificing the sense of reality; it is this impression of looking over the observer's shoulder as she follows the action of woodpeckers in her woods that appealed so much to me and that makes the whole work so convincing. Try, for example, this account of a conflict between two male sapsuckers: "Suddenly they went into an aggressive display of great intensity. This time it did not merely dissolve into pursuit, as it had done before uncounted times a day. The two males crashed together. The impact bore them to the ground, bill to bill, breast to breast, feet clawing. In a flash the two were again wing-borne and engaged in a prolonged pursuit of amazing swiftness. They chased each other through the trees so closely in serpentine undulations and dizzy curves that they looked like one, up high, down low. This went on for the best part of that day with only short pauses. Neither bird showed signs of giving in. After another fight and dash, they finally brought up together in the same poplar. There, where she had not been before, a female clung to a branch. Ensued a display of great intensity. Like knights in a tournament, crimson crests erect, bills trembling like red beards, backs deeply depressed and tails trailing, the two males rode the branch, pointing and jerking their bills from side to side." —*Robert W. Nero*, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg.