The Blue Jay Bookshelf

FIELD GUIDE TO THE NATIVE TREES OF MANITOBA. 1970. By E. T. Oswald and F. H. Nokes, Forest Research Laboratory, 25 Dafoe Road, Winnipeg 19, Manitoba 68 pp. illus. b. & w. Free. Currently out of print.

Though there are many books on trees available from different sources, few of these confine their coverage to the prairies, much less to each individual province. Such a scarcity is distressing for anyone who wishes to have a local reference that he can use quickly without reading pages of extraneous material.

This booklet contains descriptions and illustrations of all the trees in Manitoba. (A tree is defined as a woody plant with a recognizable crown, growing to a minimum height of 15 feet, with a bole diameter of not less than two inches.) The identification key is a very simple one which contains a two choice system. One is for twigs (winter) and the other for leaves (summer). There is also an illustrated glossary, and a pleasing scarcity of technical language.

I believe this booklet will serve a very useful purpose in Saskatchewan in as much as the species are mostly the same in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba. — *A. J. Hruska,* Gerald Saskatchewan.

ENVIRONMENT 1975. POLLUTION IN ALBERTA. 1970. Edited by D. A. Brookes and M. T. Myres. The Biological Sciences Society, University of Calgary. i plus 62 pp. Available from the Biological Sciences Society c/o Department of Biology, University of Calgary, Calgary 44, Alberta. Price $1.00.

This book is an edited version of a symposium sponsored by the Biological Sciences Society of the University of Calgary on February 7, 1970. After a short foreword by the Society's President, D. A. Brookes, the book commences with an introduction to the symposium by M. T. Myres. This is followed by five papers on various aspects of environmental degradation in Alberta, a panel discussion, and a section on audience participation. The book closes with two reference lists on environmental problems, one specific to Alberta, the other general, and short biographies of the panelists.

In his introduction, Tim Myres sets the course of the symposium by commenting on the recent upsurge of public awareness of environmental problems with the resultant immense volume of literature on various aspects of the subject. He notes that this has resulted in an additional problem for, since no individual can pretend to have a total grasp of the field, discussion is needed among many people of widely diversified backgrounds. Finally, he stresses that combating pollution depends on self-discipline and the formation of personal habits.

The first of the invited speakers, J. W. Kerr, in "Mining and erosion pollution in Alberta," points out that strip mining problems are easier to solve than most other problems of environmental deterioration, because the coal mining industry is the only one involved. As a result only one level of government (provincial) need be consulted, and corrective techniques are relatively simple and inexpensive if planned ahead. He emphasizes that to control strip mining properly the control must be in the hands of a government department interested in conservation, *not* one interested in mining production. Each mining company, he feels, must submit a plan before starting to mine.

D. G. McDonald follows with "Another Alberta," a tour of environmental "tragedy" throughout the province. This paper brings the many environmental problems into local focus. His paper, incidentally, prompts a comment by Myres, deploring the lack of proper documentation of local problems.

J. T. Nalbach, speaking on "Management possibilities for Alberta resources," begins by echoing Myres'

comments, regretting the lack of data showing how things were *before* pollution. His paper consists of a "brief exposition of ecology," distinguishing between renewable and non-renewable resources, emphasizing the difference between direct economic costs and total environmental values, and comparing natural systems to those modified by man. He also comments on socio-political aspects of pollution control.

The next two papers, "An engineering viewpoint" by N. G. McDuffie, and "Pollution Politics" by A. L. Harris, set out to give some clue to solutions. McDuffie, referred to by Myres as a pollution "refugee" from the United States, stresses the role which is played by individual complacency in fostering pollution. Concerning such complacency, he says, "It puts those industries and municipalities that do not care into unfair competition with those which voluntarily introduce pollution control devices. It makes for vague laws and guidelines which encourage irresponsibility." After briefly discussing nine major environmental problems, he recommends that Albertans must be intolerant of pollution, must insist on fair and equitable anti-pollution laws, and must be sure of cleaning up their own pollution. A. L. Harris distinguishes between two types of pollution-"dirty" and "deadly." The former is readily perceived, the latter not easily detected but lethal. He then discusses the potential of each level of government—municipal, provincial and federal—in combating pollution. He also comments on the role of international politics, and stresses that all politicians should be asked directly what they plan to do about the environment if elected. (Myres suggests voting for an individual rather than for a party, and voting *for* environment 1975.)

In attempting to evaluate a book of this nature, one must recall Myres' remarks on the volume of literature on the same subject, and ask whether another is even worthwhile. For this book, I feel the answer is a definite "yes". It puts pollution problems in a local perspective for Albertans. Its low price makes its contents available to virtually everyone. Its brevity and short lists of further reading material combine to bring much relevant information to even the least informed. Its superb organization makes it a useful reference for even the seasoned ecologist who wants some handy, concise statements on one problem or another. Nalbach's paper, for instance, is such a beautifully concise lecture on the ecological principles involved that it, alone, is worth the price of the book.

I heartily recommend this book to all Albertans, to anybody who wants a concise summary of pollution problems and possible solutions, and especially to anybody who wishes to organize a similar symposium. The message of the entire book is well summarized by Nalbach's statement (p. 19), "Any plan of economic conservation must take into consideration all of the costs and all of the revenues, whether or not they directly accrue to the planning agent. We are dealing with the difference between a private maximum and a social optimum in resource use."—*Martin K. McNicholl,* Winnipeg.

THE WILD DOGS. A story of wolves in Manitoba. 1969. Reprinted 1970. Text by Allan Murray. Drawings by Clarence Tillenius. Published by the Province of Manitoba, Dept. of Mines and Natural Resources Conservation and Extension Board. Available on request from Conservation Extension Branch, Box 11, 139 Tuxedo Blvd, Winnipeg 29, Manitoba.

This attractive seven-page booklet does not pretend to be a complete text book survey on wolves. Rather it briefly and concisely describes the northern Canadian timber wolf, its size and strength, its hunting habits, its effect on moose and deer, and other interesting details of its life and growth. Almost everything it says would be equally applicable to Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The writer opens with a quote from an old and highly imaginative account of an attack by a pack of wolves against a herd of white-tailed deer. This account is in the best traditions of

many old writers, both in America and Europe. He then goes on quite dispassionately to explain the errors in this account, errors which have had so much to do with the ordinary man's misjudgement of these interesting animals. He mentions that these predators, weighing as they do up to one hundred pounds, do really require large meat animals as prey in order for a pack to survive.

This may run a little contrary to the ideas of those idealists who like to think that wolves only on occasion eat prey larger than mice and varying hares, although such small game are, of course, taken also. The truth would seem to lie halfway between the beliefs of wolf-supporters and their opposite extreme, the wolf-haters who condemn the animal as a bloodthirsty and constantly wasteful destroyer of big game and livestock.

The author briefly mentions that wolves are today more numerous in certain areas than they were 70 years ago. This is probably also true in adjacent Saskatchewan. His remarks on the "old time" stories, current in three continents, which concern themselves with the ferocity of wolves towards humans, are both timely and accurate. It is quite astonishing to find that there are still people who have a mortal fear of these wild dogs.

Regarding the growing-up of young wolves, the author states that experts now agree that parent wolves do not "teach" their young to hunt, as was formerly believed. To say "teach" may smack of anthropomorphism, yet perhaps the "old-timers" are not so far wrong, except that it might be truer to say that the young "learn" to hunt by accompanying their parents in the pursuit of game; and "learn" in this case may be no more a conscious act, as with children in school, but rather an act of "imitation" — just as a child, too young to learn, will "imitate" an elder. Again, I think, the truth lies somewhere in between.

The author, and rightly, stresses the fact that wolves quite naturally attack the weaker animals in a herd, and certainly insofar as domestic cattle are concerned, I can bear this out. It is because cattle, as a rule, put up less resistance than wild game that wolves can sometimes pose a real threat to the rancher. A wise stockman, knowing this, will never allow his cattle to become too accustomed to dogs for by familiarity they lose some of their awareness to danger from wolves and other predators.

In Manitoba, we learn, control of wolves is based on the protection of livestock, while in unsettled regions they will be given equal status with other wild animals. This is an eminently sensible decision.

It is extremely pleasant to read such thoughtful and bias-free statements as: "Nature is not just wolves or deer, it is wolves and deer." Certainly this booklet should help to clarify a good deal of rather muddled thinking, to the benefit of us all, and more especially to those of us who have had the thrill of seeing and hearing one of the most typical larger mammals of our northern woods — *Canis lupus.*

A word on the illustrations. These are from the pen of that well-known wildife artist, Clarence Tillenius. They will be recognized as his work at first sight, for few artists have caught the characteristics of wild animals as well as he. These sketches add very considerably to the value of this booklet.— *R. D. Symons*, Silton.

NORTH TO CREE LAKE. 1970. By A. L. Karras. Illustrated by Laszlo Kubinyi. Trident Press, New York. 255 pp. Price $6.95.

The dust jacket of *North to Cree Lake* claims that the author "shares his love for the wilderness as it was, and may never be again, unless we reshape our values and attempt to restore what we have almost lost." The statement is misleading for it tends to confuse the author's purpose with what might be the unintentional effect of the book on today's conservation-oriented readers. Mr. Karras himself makes no attempt to exhibit either a great "love

for the wilderness" or a zeal for preserving it.

North to Cree Lake is the account of the experiences of two brothers, who, in order to escape the depressed conditions of the Thirties, go north to earn their livelihood by trapping. For the most part the author describes their adventures in a factual manner and his reporting is forthright and honest. He also includes a good deal of information about the country between Big River and Cree Lake, Indian life and customs and, of course, the animals of the area.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Karras's most vivid writing occurs when he is recounting events involved with hunting; the grim sight of dead and dying animals obviously made a deep impression on him. Yet the abundance of references to shooting game gives a certain monotony to the book at the same time as it causes the reader to speculate on specific hunting practices which the author describes. There are, for instance, sections devoted to the poisoning of wolves and the attempted hunting of caribou from moving aircraft.

One hunting passage is particularly revealing: "In October we had shot two moose so that we did not lack meat . . . In February, back of the river in an area we had never penetrated, Ab, while tracking a moose, came upon a tiny herd of caribou and by some pretty good shooting knocked down three animals. Next day, coming in with the dog team I sighted another and was able to shoot it. This small band had evidently wintered here . . . We were of the opinion that these animals had possibly slipped down from the main herds . . . "

The publisher (to quote the dust jacket again) believes that *North to Cree Lake* brings to the reader "a sense of urgency about protecting whatever is left of our environment." The preceding excerpt from the book points the accuracy of the publisher's remark, though possibly not quite in the way the advertisement intended.—*J. M. Wagner*, **Regina.**

THE WORLD OF THE BISON. 1969. Text and photographs by Ed Park. Edited by John Terres of Living World Books. Published by J. B. Lippincott, Philadelphia and New York. 161 pp. illus. Price $4.50.

Ed Park was born in Oregon, where, after receiving a B.S. degree in Fish and Game management and an M.S. in Wildlife Management from the State College, he became, in 1961, a full-time free-lance photographer and writer on outdoor subjects.

In *The World of the Bison* the author includes studies concerned with an area extending from Mexico to Alaska; for added information he draws on resource material from refuges, parks, game departments and museums. At the outset be recognizes two subspecies, the plains bison and the wood bison. (The common name "buffalo" derived through the normal sequence of word corruption from a term originating with the French voyageurs actually belongs to the water buffalo in Asia and the African buffalo.)

These bison the author finds impressive and fascinating as he follows them through the calendar year—tracing their spring and fall wanderings, recording their enjoyment of lazy summer days and their stolid indifference to winter's onslaught. In an attempt to convey the size of the bison population at the time the first white men arrived, Park suggests that if the bison were to pass by a given point single-file, one animal every two seconds, it would be the end of the fourth year before the tired tallier saw the tail of the last shaggy beast—count 63,115,200. This number, in the author's opinion, is the soundest estimate available.

About the year 1830 the white man found a market for robes and took a heavy harvest of bison from mid-October to mid December. Forty years later, when a market for leather developed, this harvest became a year-round activity.

In 1871 conservation-conscious people became alarmed but any protective bills that were passed were too late or not enforced. In 1874, in the United

States, both the House and the Senate passed a bill that would protect the females and do away with wanton destruction, but President Grant refused to sign it. Secretary Delano was quoted as saying that he would rejoice when the last bison was exterminated. General Sheridan appeared before the assembly and suggested that every hunter be given a medal with the figure of a dead buffalo on one side and that of a discouraged Indian on the other. He added, regarding the hunters, "These men have done in the last two years, and will in the next year, do more to settle the vexed Indian question than the entire regular army has done in the last 30 years . . . It would seem that the government regarded the bison as vermin. Nevertheless, the author tells us that there were other causes for the callous slaughter of the animal and he carefully considers the part played by man's greed, the coming of the railroad, the improved "buffalo guns", the westward movement of civilization and the bison's unadaptability.

By 1900 the total population of living bison in North America had been reduced to less than 250 in captivity and fewer than 300 in the wild, the latter all in Canada. Against this background one wonders how any could have survived but survive they did. Effective protective legislation was passed, game wardens posted and in the United States, Congress apportioned money to buy bison from private herds to replace some of those that had been destroyed in Yellowstone Park. Their number in North America has been increased to over 30,000 which includes the largest free-roaming herd in the world, possibly 17,000 animals. They wander at will in or near the world's largest national park, Wood Buffalo, consisting of 11,072,000 acres of unfenced wilderness in northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories of Canada.

Mr. Park has used almost 100 photographs to complement his text; he even lists the photographic equipment that he employed. A bibliography and an index enhance the value of the information in the book; statistics are interestingly presented. The author's sense of conservation is contagious and whether you are a conservationist or not it is likely that you will find yourself reading the book a second time. This account of the near destruction of a species should help educate man to the threat that man himself represents to these other creatures that he considers his enemies or competitors. It also shows that man has the ability, sometimes, to see and correct his mistakes — if he recognizes his error in time. — *V. J. Harper*, Saskatoon.

Letters and Notes

WINTER SIGHTINGS OF THE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH IN MANITOBA

Just after Chrismas, 1970 I received a report of a flock of birds that were coming to the feeding station of Mr. and Mrs. R. Lissaman at their home overlooking the Assiniboine and Minnedosa River valleys about 10 miles west of Brandon. I went out to the Lissaman home on New Year's Day hoping to observe and identify the birds. However, it was rather late in the afternoon and, though the birds had been there earlier, they were gone.

The birds were described to me as small birds with clear colours, white wing bars and white edgings on wing feathers, V-notched tail, yellowish on throat and under wings, clear greyish belly, small bill, chestnut to olive on head and back, with no streaking. Looking through Peterson's *Field guide to the birds*, we concluded they were not any of the usual winter birds such as redpolls or Pine Siskins. When I returned home, I studied other bird books, and concluded that the birds at the feeding station must be American Goldfinches.

On January 10, 1971, accompanied by Mamie McCowan, I paid another visit to the Lissamans, arriving about 12:45 p.m. This time we were fortun-