

# The Blue Jay Bookshelf



**HIGH ARCTIC.** An expedition to the unspoiled North. 1971. By George Miksch Sutton. Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., New York. Published simultaneously in Canada by Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd., Toronto. 116 pp. Illus. \$14.95.

The designation "High Arctic" in itself stirs the imagination. Add the visual impact of the two-page spread of snowy wastes across which George Sutton has pictured four muskoxen travelling to their feeding grounds on Bathurst Island, and you have begun to catch the flavour of this work. The four muskoxen in fact provide a visual motif for Sutton's book. Reduced to simple black-and-white silhouette, they reappear several times against the wide white margin of a page of text. Four other colour plates are used in the same way—the water colour paintings of Greater Snow Geese, of King Eiders, of Brant, and of the Long-tailed Jaeger. Through the use of these black-and-white motifs, the author-artist insists upon the unique character of the icelands of our Canadian North which his five large paintings are intended to suggest. There are seven more colour plates by the artist, and a portfolio of full-colour reproductions of the eleven can be purchased, while the supply lasts, for \$14.95. In addition to the paintings and sketches by the author, there is

also a series of photographs taken in the North by David F. Parmalee, Stewart D. MacDonald, David R. Gray and Philip Taylor, members of the party that Sutton joined on Bathurst Island. The descriptive legend for each photograph is imaginatively accompanied by a quotation from the text.

To my mind, Sutton's book is primarily an art book. Its large format, the two-page panorama of the Arctic presented by almost every painting, the fine white paper on which the text is set, with great open margins broken only by the severe black-and-white sketches, are visually very effective. Even the photographs, such as those of the Epstein-like monoliths and the old bull muskox or the young arctic hare, share this artistic quality, although there are a few which are less effective and seem to clutter the page.

When Sutton puts aside his brush to take up the pen, it is again with an artist's eye for concrete and striking detail that he recounts his experiences and describes the rare birds and mammals of the High Arctic; muskoxen, Peary's caribou, the Barren Grounds wolf, lemmings, jaegers, rock ptarmigan, ivory gulls, purple sandpipers, and snow owls with *horns*.

The dual nature of this book is a direct result of the double role played by Sutton, as artist and ornithologist,

on the expedition to Bathurst Island which he was invited by the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Ottawa to join in the spring of 1969, and of which he gives us his account here. As a member of the party, he was expected to do some painting, but also to study the behaviour, life history and distribution of arctic shorebirds.

Although it is only a part of the larger whole (taking up no more than 66 short pages), the written story of Sutton's experiences on this "expedition to the unspoiled north" (the subtitle used by Sutton) cannot help being an exciting one. Sutton had previously taken many trips into the north, but only to the southern islands of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago which men who have lived along the shores of the North Polar Mediterranean lump scornfully with the rest of North America as "the banana belt." It was with considerable enthusiasm, therefore, that he accepted the invitation to go to Cornwallis, Bathurst, Ellesmere, and other really far northern islands.

From Resolute on Cornwallis Island, Sutton flew to Bathurst on June 7 in a badly crowded Otter with other members of the party, their luggage and supplies, and a friendly husky, Tuka. Camp was along the eastern side of the Island on a snow-covered ridge inland from Goodsir Inlet, and temporary "Parcoll" huts were set up as accommodation. This was also Sutton's studio where he worked on paintings from sketches made in the field. His younger graduate - student companions were engaged variously in studying the muskoxen (which so stirred Sutton's imagination because their lives were "won against such incredible odds"), snowy owls, the courtship behaviour of the rock ptarmigan, sanderlings, and so on. At the time of Sutton's arrival, everyone was eagerly watching for the first saxifrage bloom and the first purple sandpipers, for even on this date in June, spring had not yet come to the High Arctic. By such imaginative details, Sutton makes us appreciate the difference in plant and animal life between those latitudes and ours. The excitement of scientific discovery

is also conveyed — as, for example, when buff-breasted sandpipers, not on the official bird list for Bathurst Island, are seen, or when ivory gulls are finally spotted (after a long search for them farther north) upon return to Resolute. Sutton's comments also reflect his scientific curiosity, as he puzzles over the explanation for the "absences of hares from an area in one summer day and abundances of hares in a not-very-far-removed area on the very next day", or the reason for the strange failure to see a single raven or falcon, although they had travelled by plane beyond Bathurst Island to Eureka on Ellesmere and across Axel Heiberg Island to Merghen Island. But the viewpoint of the scientist, eager to record facts, never dominates Sutton's account of the expedition. He has the general reader constantly in mind, and makes his appeal to him through concrete descriptions and humanly-warming anecdotes. I think here, for example, of Sutton's vivid picture of himself trying to fend off the over-friendly advances of three exuberant huskies that "boiled around" his feet while he yelled "Stay home!" Or of his description of his own reaction to the blood-chilling story told by his camp companion of the killing of a bull muskox by "Old Bloodface", the Barren Grounds wolf. It is evident that Sutton has the gift of a raconteur, as well as of an artist. — *Margaret Belcher, Regina.*

**THE GOOD, GOOD EARTH. 1971.**  
The MacMillan Co. of Canada, Ltd., 70  
Bond St., Toronto 2. 168 pp. Price  
\$6.95; paper back \$3.95.

"The Authors of this book are eminent scientists who are deeply concerned about the continual erosion of our environment." So reads part of the jacket advertisement, and one has only to read the book to see why this concern should be felt by all Canadians.

There is no time to be lost, the authors say, and we cannot afford to waste time belabouring the "other fellow" for his sins, for this is corporate sin, if not of commission, then of omis-

sion on the part of those of us who are silent. The subject of environmental erosion is too big, too vital for anything less than concerted action on the widest possible front.

Big Business has closed ranks to defend its ways. It pays a certain lip-service to remedial pollution measures (though little to avoidance of root causes) but only so long as such measures interfere as little as possible with profit making. Their principal protagonists appear to be those biologists who are in the pay of the industrialists, who soft pedal the ecological evils resulting from industrial raping of our country—and the world.

We would do well to beware of the soothing syrup offered to us by way of articles, radio talks and glossy coloured advertisements showing sleek Angus cattle feeding peaceably in the shadow of great oil refineries. The fact that the oil companies can pay out so much for this counter-propaganda is in itself a straw which indicates there is something rotten. It is time, therefore, that everybody look at the pollution problem coolly but realistically, and then pull together — not only the ecologists, economists, biologists, social planners and industrialists, but also every common or garden citizen.

In order to assess the real facts we — the public as well as the government — can no longer afford to listen only to the comforting words of the engineers and industrial planners; we *must* listen as carefully to the independent ecologists who have no axe to grind but who have the good of our country and its future in mind. If we do not give these men a hearing, if we continue to speak of them as “cranks,” “fanatics” and “Jeremiahs”, then we shall be compounding the problem and be too late to take necessary action. For too long have we thought of “growth” as “progress”, for too long have we made a god of industry, and if we continue to do so it will be at our peril, and the peril of future generations.

There is so much that is quotable in this book that one is tempted to crib whole sentences, but we remember that

the reviewer's job is not to do that but simply to express an opinion as to the validity and readability of a book.

Therefore I shall say that at its price, this book is one that we can hardly afford *not* to read, unless we are content to remain in ignorance of the rapidity with which our resources — especially our resources of fossil energy (oil, gas, etc.) — are being exhausted. This, together with our extravagant wastage of wildlife, and worse, of our precious soil, can and probably will bring about such drastic changes as will amount to the decay of our civilization. (It would be a dreadful shock to many people if they found that oil resources had become so meagre in supply that oil had to be rationed and fed out only to basic or most important industries. No more wheeling out the family car to take in the Calgary Stampede!)

Finally, while in the nature of things certain technical words are bound to occur in a book of this kind, I must congratulate the authors on a very readable piece of work; I feel sure that anyone should be able to understand the urgent message it contains. For my part, once I started to read it, I could not put it down.

So buy it, and if you can't do that, beg it; or as a last resort steal it. But read it.—*R. D. Symons, Silton.*

**STILL THE WIND BLOWS. 1971. By R. D. Symons, Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon. 283 pp. illus.**

The fictional hero of this novel, set in the Canadian North-West and Saskatchewan in the period 1860-1916, is John Curtis, son of an American trapper, raised by a Cree foster mother, who is a participant in the notable events of the period, including the North-West Rebellion, and rises to the rank of Superintendent in the Royal North-West Mounted Police. The author, Dr. R. D. Symons of Silton, in the past seven years has published *Many Trails, Hours and the Birds*, and *The Broken Snare*, three books well-known to readers of the *Blue Jay*. This

novel reflects the author's long acquaintance and sympathy with the native peoples. The treatment of such episodes as the Rebellion, the Battle of Wounded Knee, and the repatriation of Canadian Indians following the latter event, illuminates the Indian position. Despite the mutual respect which featured the relationship between the early Mounted Police and the Indians, misunderstanding had arisen between Indians and incoming settlers, direct contacts became infrequent; hence, "still brother sees brother as in a glass darkly," "still the wind blows." Dr. Symons' book will help to moderate the wind.

While this theme underlies the story, it should be enjoyed, too, for what it is, a well-written and exciting novel. The author's excellent drawings help to recreate the atmosphere of the time. The characters are believable and the interpretation of historical events, for the most part, valid. The account of the Cypress Hills massacre (pp. 15-17, 271) is least satisfactory. It is misdated (it occurred in 1873) and the participants could have been identified with more certainty. The perpetrators included Canadians as well as Americans, the Indians were surely the Assiniboine band of Chief Little Soldier, and there was more than one white trader on the scene. The summary of the trials and convictions following the Rebellion (pp. 162-163) is incomplete. The author may be overly kind to Judge Richardson, "who did his best." In his charges to the juries, Richardson tended to do his best to secure convictions, but his sentences could be regarded as humane. The statement that "the chiefs might well have been hanged" is misleading in reference to these trials since the Crown at the outset decided to charge them only with treason-felony, for which the punishment was imprisonment, not death. That White Cap was "not punished by the authorities" (p. 277) is correct, but in fact he was arrested and held in custody for some considerable time until acquitted at his trial in September, 1885.

One incidental reference which would

merit amendment is to the long stacks of buffalo bones piled up "by the railway track at Wascana—Pile of Bones—which had given that original name to what was now Regina" (p. 79). The bones had accumulated and were piled up at the Old Crossing many years before there was a railway track; they were noted and the place so-called by travellers as early as the 1850's. The spelling "North west Territories," adopted throughout by the publisher, is regrettable, since "North-West Territories" was the almost universal form. Moreover, it was the official spelling in acts of Parliament, government reports, and map nomenclature.

Dr. Symons concludes his introduction with the "fervent hope that one day the terms 'rebel Crees,' now embossed on the cairn marking the site of the Battle of Cut Knife Hill, may be removed forever." The plaque was revised and replaced, in 1952. All readers of this novel will be glad to learn of that action, and to know, as well, that plaques commemorating Poundmaker and Big Bear will be erected by the federal government, following recent recommendations of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.—A. R. Turner, Provincial Archivist, Regina.

**CANADIAN WILDLIFE SERVICE '71. 1971. By the Canadian Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment. Catalogue No. R66-3771. Information Canada, Ottawa. \$1.00.**

"Canadian Wildlife Service '71" is a status report of the various activities of the Canadian Wildlife Service. The varied nature of the reports, from discussions of improvements of potholes for waterfowl nesting to the work of the public information services, illustrates well the maturation of wildlife agencies to groups concerned with all aspects of the natural world.

Most of the booklet consists of a series of short reports of specific research projects being undertaken throughout Canada. These are arranged by area of concentration, such as migratory birds, land management,

mammals, limnology and ecology. Short sections on pathology, toxic chemicals, biometry, interpretation and information services are written as compilations of the work being done within that specific field in Canada.

Of special interest to the people of Saskatchewan will be reports on western waterfowl populations and the management and ecology of waterfowl habitats in the prairies. Also interesting is the report on various toxic chemicals which reflects the growing concern of governmental agencies with the effects of all chemicals which are possible or proven poisons.

The reports are of necessity, very brief and only indicate the nature of the projects without including very much specific data. The booklet is illustrated with a number of handsome photographs of research areas and animals and of the researchers at work.

—*D. M. Secoy*, Regina.

**THE GREAT WHITE BEARS. 1971.**  
By Robert W. Nero, Department of Mines, Resources and Environmental Management, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

It is a far cry from the simple pamphlets that government departments used to issue to the current glossy-paper productions embellished by handsome colour plates and professional photography. *The Great White Bears* is cast in the new mould, like the recent Canadian Wildlife Service publications. Such a production is necessarily very expensive; in this one, for example, six colour plates are used in a 16-page booklet. The theory appears to be that the expense is justified, since this is the only way to create an interest in wildlife in a public conditioned to glossy magazines.

This wildlife bulletin should also be capable of creating interest in photography as an art form, for the bears are imaginatively and dramatically portrayed. The effectiveness of the photographs is enhanced by the layout of the pages. Photo captions are placed in the wide margin allowed on each page (except on page 13, where a

chart runs awkwardly across the bottom of the page).

I am not familiar with the previous publications of the Manitoba Department of Mines, Resources and Environmental Management, of which W. Winston Nair is now Deputy Minister. However, I see in the format of this one the hand of Dr. Robert W. Nero, who in his previous museum career was keenly interested in display techniques. The text, of course, is also by Dr. Nero, who has given a good summary of what is known of the behaviour and distribution of the great ice bear. None of this material is new, and none of it results from Dr. Nero's own studies, so it is to be assumed that the Department authorized the preparation of this bulletin chiefly because the Polar Bear is a conspicuous mammal of the Hudson Bay coast of Manitoba, with one of the world's largest denning areas located about 40 miles south of Churchill. As such, the booklet provides interesting and authentic material for natural science classes in the schools and for the general reader, in addition to being something that anyone with a photographer's eye for an artistic subject will be glad just to look at.

No information is given as to whether the booklet can be obtained from the Department, or at what price.  
—*Margaret Belcher*, Regina.

**JUST A BUNCH OF TREES. 1970.**  
Text by H. A. Cunningham. Published by the Province of Manitoba, Department of Mines, Resources and Environment Management; Conservation Extension Branch, 139 Tuxedo Blvd., Winnipeg 29. 31 pp. Free.

"Lots of people think a forest is nothing but a bunch of trees, and they really mean it. In fact, the forest is a community of magnificent complexity. Living, organic and inorganic components are precisely arranged and controlled to create a kind of super-being that breathes, grows, changes with age, and suffers ills. When abused beyond toleration, it dies." (Foreword page 3.)

This publication is an introductory ecological description of the forest communities in Manitoba. The four communities described cover a large percentage of Manitoba's total area, and emphasize the diversity and interdependence of living things. The reader is made aware of the limitations of the forest community by physical factors such as soil type, temperature, light, rainfall, humidity, drainage and wind. The publication is enriched by photographs, diagrams and charts.

The forest is sectioned into four horizontal habitat zones, each having its characteristic micro-climate. Every living organism in the forest occupies a habitat and maintains a particular niche.

The writer stresses the relationship of habitat and niche requirements by illustrating a classical laboratory experiment wherein *Paramecium aurelia* and *P. caudatum* compete for food while occupying the same habitat and having the same niche requirements. Results show that *P. caudatum* is excluded by competition while *P. aurelia* maintains a stable maximum population level. However, when *P. caudatum*

and *P. bursaria* occupy the same habitat but have different niche requirements, both populations became stable and maximum. In the Manitoba forests, five thrush species can live harmoniously and maintain stable populations in the same habitat if stratified, because their niche requirements vary.

The concept of succession is introduced. Factors which limit or reverse this process such as fire, lumbering, agriculture, radiation, insect infestations and disease are discussed.

The writer points out that the Manitoba government is active in research, protection and conservation of its forest resources.

Many terms, concepts and themes basic to ecology are emphasized in this booklet. Numerous activities and projects could be developed from the material presented — for example, development of a food web showing dynamic inter-relationships of the forest's plants and animals. This publication is a good reference for the general public, as well as for students and teachers involved in elementary and high school life science programs. —*Mary A. L. Brown, Regina.*

## Letters and Notes

### POISON BAIT STATIONS

A notice dated December 2, 1971, in the Hudson Bay paper warns residents to take precautions with their animals because 1080 Poison Bait Stations have been placed in eight different quarter sections in LID #944.

I used to live in the Hudson Bay area and remember when these animals were not harassed by man and snowmobiles. I and my family, although we own skidoos, see no sport in running down animals.

What worries me about the placing of poison bait is the fact that eagles, hawks, and owls are endangered. Domestic animals that can be replaced are surely not so important as a bald or golden eagle.

Can something be done soon? — (Mrs.) *Jean Harris, Kindersley.*

### A WINTER PRAIRIE FALCON

While walking along No. 39 highway just south of Weyburn, Saskatchewan, on December 14, 1971, my companion, Roger Barlow, noticed a large "hawk" flying towards us in a northeasterly path. Though I had no binoculars with me at the time, the bird, which was a falcon, approached closely enough for us to note its large size, pale coloration, and black axillars, which clinched its identification as a Prairie Falcon. Its flight was strong, rapid, and fairly close to the ground. The bird was flying towards some grain elevators at the south end of the city, where we lost sight of it. The sighting was made at about 4:00 p.m. with overcast skies.—*Robert Kneba, 144 Milne St., Regina.*