

TREASURY OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDLORE

PAUL S. ERIKSSON and ALAN PISTORIUS, editors. 1987. Paul S. Eriksson, Middlebury, Vermont. 18 b-a-w plates. 386 pp. \$24.95

Like most anthologies, the *Treasury of North American Birdlore* contains such a range of material that no single reader is likely to enjoy every selection. And, of course, while sampling a little of this and a little of that, an anthology cannot exhaust any particular subject. The intent of the *Treasury* is merely to sample popular North American bird literature over the past four centuries. The result is a fair bedside reader, more entertaining than informing, and perhaps a little thin on conservation.

Initially published in 1962, this updated edition of the *Treasury* offers thirty new selections gleaned from current popular bird literature. The remaining fifty-plus selections have been carried over from the first edition and are, for the most part, unchanged.

For sheer entertainment, nothing in the collection reads better than the pieces by George Miksch Sutton — all three of which appeared in the first edition. His account of an early trip to Churchill, Manitoba to record for science the first Harris Sparrow nest is among the best writing in the *Treasury*, and particularly interesting to Canadians. The remaining two selections from Sutton are amusing boyhood

stories: one describing the incredible antics of two pet roadrunners; the other, a nightmarish but hilarious encounter he had with hundreds of daddy longlegs, a nest of mice and a brooding Turkey Vulture — all while stuck in a hollow log. Sutton, unlike many of the other writers in this anthology, never takes himself too seriously.

Several of the *Treasury's* better selections are taken from narrative works where the author attempts to reveal the intimate life of an individual bird. David Rains Wallace's cuckoo fledgling (from *Idle weeds: the life of a sandstone ridge*) and Sally Carighars's Trumpeter Swan family (from *One day at Teton Marsh*) are vividly brought to life in a manner that mere scientific reporting cannot achieve. A segment out of Fred Bodsworth's *Last of the Curlews* would have added a lot to this anthology's sampling from the genre. Similarly, it is unfortunate that the editors' only selection from all of Ernest Thompson Seton's nature writing is a rather dry letter he wrote to the *Auk* on the subject of popular bird nomenclature.

Despite several well chosen examples of North American bird literature, the *Treasury* suffers from the inclusion of a few too many selections from the John Burroughs school of inspirational nature writing. In the book's introduction, the editors attempt to persuade readers of the value of this anthropomorphizing "twaddle," saying modern audiences are too quick to scoff at a man who leads with the heart. They may be right, and a few read-

ers may be interested in sentimental bird writing as literary/ornithological history, but many will simply tire of it by the time they have finished the second Burroughs essay — a diatribe against that blood-thirsty scoundrel, the Northern Shrike.

As can be expected in a book covering 400 years of bird literature, many of the authors' attitudes, observations and assumptions appear quaint or even dangerous to a modern reader. Unfortunately, the 30 new selections do little to demonstrate how far ornithology and conservation have advanced in the 25 years since the *Treasury* was first published.

Like far too many books, this one leaves conservation to the last, with a single concluding chapter of essays. Most of the selections deal with bird protection, not habitat conservation, and recount the market-gunning, hawk slaughter, and egret-pluming of yesteryear. After registering a degree of shock over these bygone atrocities, the reader could simply close the book, feeling moral and righteous, were it not for the final essay, Christopher Leahy's list of "Man-made threats to bird-life" (placed like an afterthought of bad news out of place in a celebration of birds). This selection reminds us of the current crisis for North American birds, but it is the only one that does so.

In the introduction the editors explain that "contemporary scientific ornithology is under-represented in this volume . . . because that literature is largely inaccessible to the intelligent non-scientist and few practitioners attempt to translate their work for general consumption." A brief glance at the Blue Jay Bookshop's list of current bird books will refute this peculiar statement. A second glance will turn up books page for page more worthy of purchase than this disappointing anthology. — Reviewed by *Trevor Herriot*, 2963 Argyle Street, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4S 2B1

TALES OF A LOW RENT BIRDER

PETE DUNNE; drawings by DAVID SIBLEY. 1986. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ. 175 pp. hardcover \$15.95 US

This book is a series of 19 short stories originally published as part of a series in a newspaper. The average length of each story is about eight pages and a great variety is offered. The author is obviously attracted to raptors as this group of birds is the most frequently written about, but there are stories about shearwaters and ducks and even "the death of a season." The area most frequently written about is the eastern United States, in particular the Cape May Bird observatory in New Jersey where the author works.

Although the stories are as one would expect of personal reflections on happenings in the author's life, they nonetheless are interesting. In addition there are little bonuses to be gleaned from the book. An example is the characteristics used to identify migrating shorebirds during the fall from an aircraft - and you thought they were tough from the ground with a spotting scope - can you imagine identifying them without binoculars from a vehicle moving at 80 miles per hour.

I found the book interesting and relaxing reading. Although I feel the book is overpriced for its content and size, it may be worth the cost if you enjoy short stories and light humor. A lower priced soft cover would have been much more — appropriate. — Reviewed by *Wayne C. Harris*, Box 414, Raymore, Saskatchewan. S0A 3J0

EAGLES OF NORTH AMERICA

CANDACE SAVAGE. 1987. WESTERN Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. 127 pp. Hardcover \$24.95.

Eagles of North America is Candace Savage's fourth natural history book. Its concise, informative text and excellent photographs combine to give the reader a solid introduction to the biology of the two eagle species known to breed in North America — the Bald Eagle and the Golden Eagle.

The 12-page introduction constitutes the text. It includes a page of maps that show the breeding ranges and winter ranges of both species. The text is balanced and generally well-written. It is also wide-ranging, touching on eagle symbolism in mythology, religion and politics, on the vagueness of the term "eagle" in taxonomy, the birds' hunting equipment and soaring flight, field marks, range and habitat preferences, food and feeding behaviour, migration and sociability, flight displays, nesting cycle and fratricide among nestlings, reproductive success, decline in numbers, and prospects for the future. On this last subject the author is guardedly optimistic. She delivers the message that bears a million repetitions, namely that the eagles' welfare is linked to our own.

"The environment does not merely surround us: it is us," she writes. "If other living things are being harmed, we are as well. Eagles remind us of our vital connections."

Savage also raises a few questions that have intrigued eagle-watchers and researchers for years. Why do the Florida Bald Eagles nest in November and December and then migrate north in the summer, contrary to the practice not only of other Bald Eagle populations but of birds in general? At congregations of Bald Eagles, such as in Alaska's Chilkat Valley

in autumn, do mates accompany each other? Do young birds follow their parents? Are new pairs being formed?

In terms of sheer space, however, the book's *raison d'être* lies in its photographs, which occupy 98 pages against the text's 12. There are 92 photos in all, including the two on the covers, and they represent work from 24 photographers. Of the 92 photographs, 68 are of Bald Eagles, 23 of Golden Eagles and one of Steller's Sea-Eagle. The caption for this last states that Steller's Sea Eagle and the White-headed Sea Eagle are occasional visitors to North America, when in fact the *White-tailed* Eagle is a regular visitor and Steller's Sea-Eagle is casual in western Alaska, with only one recent record.

The photos are, with only one exception, uniformly excellent, both in terms of content and in printing quality. As C. Stuart Houston points out in the Foreword, a reader's appreciation for the photographer's work here is heightened with knowledge of the remote and often difficult-of-access terrain and nesting sites that eagles favour. Along with photos of the birds nesting, feeding, squabbling, hunting and loafing, there are several of birds on the wing — particularly praiseworthy photographic accomplishments, and here brought off to great effect. A comic two photo sequence shows a young Bald Eagle, watched by an adult, coming in for a landing on the ground and then achieving that landing as feet, bill and outstretched left wing strike earth simultaneously.

The photos constitute a splendid collection, but there are at least two mistakes in the captions in addition to the one mentioned above. The first is an error of omission. The caption for a cliff-face eyrie photo showing a young Bald Eagle states only that "Either species may nest on cliffs, though it is more common for Golden Eagles to do so" — without naming the species in the photo. The other mistake

is more categorical. The caption for a photo showing a young Bald Eagle caught in the entrails of a road-killed deer identifies the bird as a Golden Eagle.

The bibliography lists 63 well-chosen references by 58 authors. The index lists subjects, species and proper names and refers the reader both to relevant text pages and photo pages. However, because index entries are geared strictly to caption content rather than photo content, the index is arguably incomplete. A spectacular shot of a young Golden Eagle, for

instance, in its cliff-side nest is indexed under "Sub-adult," the key word of the caption, but not under "Nesting sites."

These cavils aside, the book remains an attractive and informative introduction to two magnificent species. Even those readers for whom the text is perhaps too basic will derive much enjoyment from the photographs. They are aesthetically pleasing as well as descriptive. — Reviewed by *Bob Kohlmeier*, R.R. 5, G.B. 75, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7K 3J8

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