
NATURE LIBRARY

WINGS OVER THE PRAIRIE

Essays by H. ALBERT HOCHBAUM. Compiled and edited by GEORGE HOCHBAUM. Photography by JACK A. BARRIE and GLENN D. CHAMBERS. Tamos Books, Hyperion Press, Winnipeg. 1994. 116 pp. \$32.95.

Al Hochbaum died on 2 March 1988 but his memory lives on in his books. His first prize-winning book, in 1944, *The Canvasback on a Prairie Marsh*, is still in print, and is a classic worth reading and rereading. Al's other books include *Travels and Traditions of Waterfowl* and *To Ride the Wind*. His expertise was recognized by the University of Regina, which in the 1950s sponsored a series of lectures by Al on how to write.

On the fiftieth anniversary of Al's first book, his son George, a wildlife biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service in Winnipeg, has edited 13 of his father's unpublished essays, modified one other, and written a succinct three-page introduction to produce *Wings Over the Prairie*. Gene Bossenmaier, former Director of Resource Planning and Allocation for the Manitoba Department of Natural Resources, and now retired to Mayview, Saskatchewan (where he is studying the fungi in Prince Albert National Park) has provided a four-page foreword.

This is a beautiful book, the illustrations alone are worth the price. They include 22 of Al's incomparable pen-and-ink sketches, and one of his fine egg tempera paintings, "Canvasbacks against the sun." There are also 58 superb colour photographs by Barrie and Chambers, who in three pages share their expertise

concerning how to take photographs of birds in flight.

The informative text, easy to read, deals with many aspects of the ecology of Canadian prairie marshes. Hochbaum shares his belief that the two greatest obstacles to protection of marshes and their wildlife are public objection and political apathy. To restore wildlife resources, our first need is an understanding of why many species are declining. Apathy, says Hochbaum, "can be overcome only by deliberate, patient demonstration and education." Universities "must bring the aesthetic and economic values of wildlife into the overall academic plan. The student of engineering, agriculture, law, or architecture whose program has included at least an orientation course in conservation ... is a better and more caring citizen." This book is an ideal present for duck hunters, anyone who loves marshes, and those interested in nature photography.

Reviewed by C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8

SHADOWBIRDS — A QUEST FOR RAILS

WILLIAM BURT. 1994. Lyons and Burford, New York. 161 pp., hard cover.

I like the book *Shadowbirds* very much. It is a book of 161 pages packed with delightful reading and remarkable pictures — all about trying time after time, place after place, to get pictures of rails at night. It is about many, many other topics as well, told with exceptional skill and good humour.

William Burt had the same



Virginia Rail

Wayne Lynch

experiences with rails that I have had and he has written what I would like to have written.

In North America there are six kinds of rails. Burt writes about all of them. In Saskatchewan we might expect to see three kinds: Sora — widespread in marshes; Virginia Rail — not as common; and Yellow Rail — very, very rare and choosy about where they live.

Rails are curious characters. Un-birdlike, they are fleet on foot and clumsy in the air. They live in the thickest of marshes, where they spend their lives unseen. Rails are prowlers in places of mud and shadow, slinkers in reeds and grasses, jittery nondescripts that shrink from view and slip silently away.

William Burt has a captivating way of writing that keeps you reading. For example:

“Eight years ago I made a try for Maryland Black rails. I brought

company along, a wife and a sister-in-law; and you don't want to do that if you want to find Black rails.”

“Start tape player ... in seconds he is there, rapping on the speaker like a woodpecker. He backs off, climbs several inches up a nearby plant stalk, puffs out his chest feathers and growls, then dives at the machine bill-first, like a dart. He walks around the Panasonic monster, pecking it several times, loses interest and disappears.”

“Right at my feet a big brown bird jumped off its basketful of eggs and stood still, staring, engaging me like a warrior, with feathers all puffed out and bristling, growling its animosity.”

I very much enjoyed reading *Shadowbirds* and I am happy to have the book in my nature library. I recommend that you read this charming book whether or not you have ever seen a rail.

Reviewed by *Mabel Charlton*, 501 McGilivray Drive, Weyburn, Saskatchewan. S4H 1L9