

MARSHES: THE DISAPPEARING EDENS

WILLIAM BURT. 2007. Yale University press, New Haven. ISBN 978-0-300-12229-9. Hard cover. 90 color photographs. 22 x 26 cm. xii + 180 pp. \$35.00 U.S.

In this sumptuous book, beautifully written, we follow Bill Burt on a pilgrimage to discover hidden treasures within marshes across North America. En route, we get his pungent commentary concerning what humankind has almost totally destroyed. Marshes, the most heavily impacted habitats on our continent, continue to diminish.

We learn about marshes across the United States. Native Phragmites, Common Reed, has spread out across the wetlands at the mouth of the Connecticut River, "snuffing out the rightful plants and ousting native birds, acre after acre." The salt marshes of Elliott Island along the east coast of Chesapeake Bay remain home to the enigmatic little Black Rail. The five miles of open salt marshes at Great Bay, near Tuckerton, New Jersey, is still an enchanted place, although only a two-hour drive from New York City. The man-made, square ponds in Sacramento Refuge are the forlorn remnants of the four million acres of wetlands formerly present in the Central Valley of California. At the Lower Klamath Lake Refuge in extreme northern California, there are dikes and open water without their former sedges and cattails; sadly, no tules remain at Tule Lake. In Idaho, Burt takes us on a tour of Camas Refuge, Grays Lake Refuge and, on the Utah border, Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge. A sign at the Monte Vista Refuge in southern Colorado gives some public recognition of changes wrought by the

human hand: "Spring Creek once flowed about 8,000 gallons of water, creating a wetland haven ... Many wells were drilled ... In the mid-1960s, the spring ceased flowing."

Two chapters deal with marshes in western Canada. The first is Sewell Lake and the adjacent two miles of sedges south of Douglas, Manitoba. Here Burt photographed Yellow Rail and Sora, LeConte's Sparrows, fireflies and lightning, and studied the calls of Sedge Wrens and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows.

The second Canadian chapter ends the book, finishing with strength. Burt tells us that in June 1905, A. C. Bent, the author/editor of the 23 volumes of *Life Histories of North American Birds*, discovered the marsh mapped as "Lake of the Narrows," a half-mile north of the siding at Sidewood, Saskatchewan on the Canadian Pacific Railway mainline. Bent estimated that there were between 15,000 and 20,000 gull nests in this colony, "one of the most spectacular, most interesting, and most beautiful sights in the realm of North American ornithology." Only six miles to the west, north of Piapot, was Crane Lake. Referred to by Bent as "the gem of all the wonderful bird country," Crane Lake was mainly dry when Earl Godfrey visited in 1948. Burt gives credit to Ducks Unlimited for the restoration of this marsh, achieved with a circular containment dike that holds runoff in an area one quarter the size of the original wetland, now embellished with

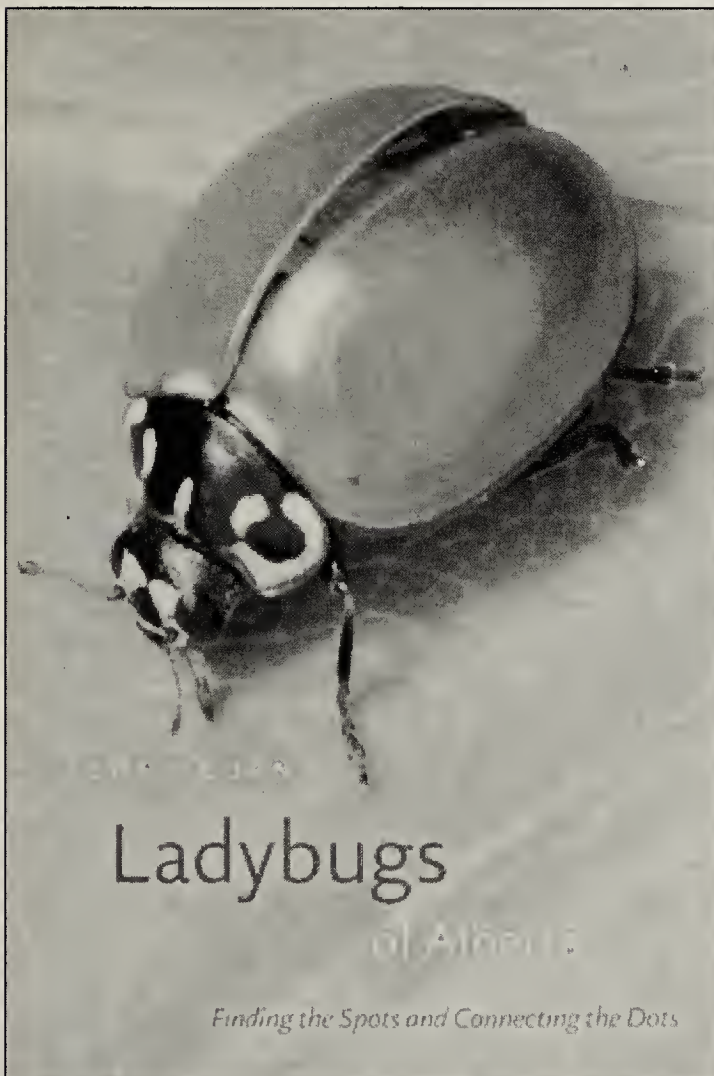
50 earthen nesting islands and five gravel loafing bars. "Among the rushes," Burt notes, are "small pools and labyrinthine corridors, most hidden but betrayed by honks and splashes of cavorting coots, the oinking of eared grebes, and the bubbly courtship quacks of ruddy ducks" – and hundreds of pairs of Franklin's Gulls, "impressive, still." Burt's photographs of the Crane Lake marsh near sunset, and of the Pied-billed, Western and Eared Grebes, each with young, rank with the best anywhere.

This book is not an oversize coffee table book and, considering its quality, the price is about half of what might have been expected. The high quality reproductions were made in Italy. Buy it, read it, admire it, savor it. It would be a perfect gift for any naturalist, any wildlife photographer, anyone who loves our remaining marshes.

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LADYBUGS OF ALBERTA: FINDING THE SPOTS AND CONNECTING THE DOTS

JOHN ACORN. 2007. University of Alberta Press. 169 pages. Soft Cover. 152.5mm x 228.5 mm. 120 colour photographs, 2 black-and-white photographs, 95 colour paintings, 75 maps. ISBN 0-88864-381-0. Cost: \$29.95.



Many naturalists, including myself, have been waiting impatiently for the latest John Acorn book in the Alberta Insect Series, which to date includes books on Tiger Beetles and Damselflies. As an author, John has incredible interpretive ability and his latest book explores an attractive yet poorly covered group – the ladybugs. This book abounds with John's excellent photographs as well as his engaging and entertaining writing style.

This book opens with a gallery of all species covered in the book. This series of paintings of all species known from Alberta, along with much of their variation, is displayed in a layout that lends itself to easy comparisons for quick identification. Following this are six chapters that cover everything from the ladybug basics and natural history, to study

and conservation, and wraps up with the species accounts.

In the introductory chapter, John clearly explains what a ladybug is, including explanations of terminology used. The second chapter, "Life of a Ladybug," is appropriately thorough and investigates many interesting areas such as the common misconception that ladybugs are the "gardener's friends." In the chapter, "Ladybug Study in Alberta," John gives us an appreciation of where our knowledge came from and interesting insights into the pioneers of the study. The fourth chapter, "Introduced Ladybugs and Conservation," is an exceptional piece on introduced species and how the effects on the native fauna can be overblown. He also presents a fresh perspective about how non-native species are demonized that I think all naturalists should read. The remaining two chapters contain the species accounts that cover all seventy-five species recorded in Alberta, including the lesser ladybugs that previously only the most seasoned coleopterists would consider looking at. The inclusion of the latter group is an important part of this well-researched book.

Most species accounts are accompanied by a great photograph, and for each there is a North American range map and a useful pronunciation guide (humourously including the

pronunciation of "sp." [ssPUH]). As with his previous books, he has entertaining rhyming couplets and even explains the origins of the scientific and common names for each species. Species identification is more than just a description in many cases and includes useful identification hints. Finally the notes section expands on a broad range of interesting tidbits and stories to wrap up the species accounts.

The three appendices contain a checklist, glossary, and helpful sources for ladybug study. Finally there is a detailed reference section.

While this book focuses on the Albertan fauna, it will still cover most species encountered in surrounding provinces and states. My only criticisms of this book are minor. In the photo opposite of page one, the antenna is labelled incorrectly as a maxillary palp. Also of minor importance, the ladybug gallery lacks any indication of scale which would be useful for beginners.

Overall this is a book that should be on every naturalist's bookshelf whether or not they consider themselves entomologists. It is a rare example of a book that has the ability to inspire young and old to become "Nature Nuts".

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"I am no more lonely than a single mullein or dandelion in a pasture, or a bean leaf, or sorrel, or a horse-fly, or a bumblebee. I am no more lonely than the Mill Brook, or a weathercock, or the north star, or the south wind, or an April shower, or a January thaw, or the first spider in a new house."

- Henry David Thoreau

MYSTERY PHOTO

JUNE 2007 MYSTERY PHOTO

The creature shown in Figure 1 is about 4 mm long and was found on a crane fly (an example of a crane fly is shown in Figure 2). What is the creature and what was it doing on the crane fly?



Figure 1. Robert Bercha © 2007.

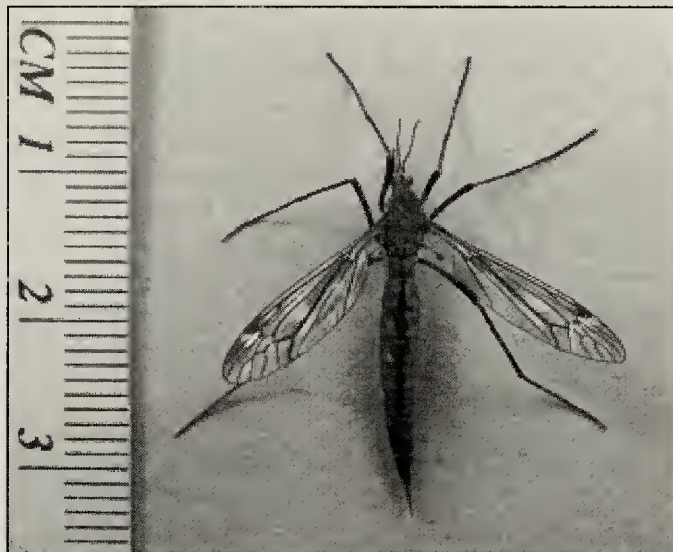


Figure 2. Robert Bercha, © 2005

ANSWER TO THE MARCH 2007 MYSTERY PHOTO

The mystery bird shown in the March issue is a Bald Eagle. The Bald Eagle was photographed on a slough in the National Wildlife Area south of Last Mountain Regional Park on 1 September 2005. According to Al Smith, who took the photograph, "It dove into the slough (presumably after something), then sat like a goose on the water for perhaps a minute. I was thinking I would have to go rescue it, but then it got up and flew away without difficulty."

