

## NATURE IN IRELAND

A scientific and cultural history. Edited by Joan Wilson Foster (1997). Dufour Editions Inc. Chester Springs. PA 19425-0007. Paper \$39.95. 658 pages.

This substantial fine printed book is a very interesting social history of nature studies in Ireland, principally over the last four hundred years. One thing immediately obvious is that this book is a study of natural history as seen through Anglo-Irish eyes, rather than through Gaelic-Irish eyes, as the vast majority of the chapters, authors and names mentioned in the text are non Gaelic-Irish family names. This is due to a number of social factors including the fact that until recent times the native Irish had not the time, education nor the money to pursue leisure activities such as the study of the many branches of natural history. The dominant catholic church's ambivalent attitude toward the study of nature also did not help (Pages 427-436).

The book is written in a manner that the educated layman can readily understand. It is divided into twenty-six chapters each written by specialists in the subject under discussion. The chapters cover such diverse subjects as geology, meteorology, botany, physical geography, entomology, mammalogy, ornithology, fisheries, major ecological surveys, Irish naturalists abroad, enlightenment and education, Darwin in Belfast, nature and Irish nationalism, the issue of names (Irish names of birds, plants etc), the history of Natural History, the art of nature illustration, field sports (hunting, shooting, fishing), the natural history of demesnes (large estates), attitudes to nature in Ireland, and the culture of nature.

The book should have wide readership as it combines a very detailed account of natural history together with the attitudes of the various ethnic groups living in Ireland towards their surroundings, and what they perceive other groups in society are doing to improve them, limit access to them, leave the habitat as is, or destroy the habitat as the majority group sees it.

Most of the material in this book should be of interest to Canadian naturalists as they could make comparisons with Canadian physical and social conditions. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are considerable differences in attitudes to the natural environment among French-Canadians, English-Canadians, southern aboriginal nations, and Arctic aboriginal groups. What group has published the earliest and most papers on natural history? What are their attitudes to the natural environment, appreciation or consumption? What is the place of nature in the culture and art of these peoples? The book explains what happened in Ireland, and gives stimulating guidelines on subjects to cover for comparison purposes. It is a useful addition to personal, school and university libraries.

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# WILD BIRDS ACROSS THE PRAIRIES

WAYNE LYNCH. 1999. 138 pp. Fifth House Ltd., Calgary, AB 138 pp., illus., index. Soft cover, \$24.95.

A physician, practising in Regina at the time, Wayne Lynch decided in 1979 to switch careers. Having fallen in love with the native prairie grasslands, he was determined to document their beauty, variety, and fragility in the face of human encroachment. He fondly remembers his early association with Fred Lahrman, Lorne Scott and Gary Seib, local photographer-naturalists whose infectious interest in the outdoors, birds in particular, no doubt influenced his decision to become a nature photographer full-time.

Remembering the thrill I felt when I laid eyes on *Married to the Wind*, Wayne Lynch's first book about prairie grasslands (1983), I felt the same keen anticipation when I learned that he had just produced a new book on prairie birds. *Wild Birds Across the Prairies* is a handsome volume, 138 pages in 8½ x 11 format, lavishly illustrated with color photos. Following a brief introduction, a map, and four illustrations of varied prairie habitat, Lynch uses an approach similar to that used in most field guides. He documents 85 species, most of them associated with the prairies, providing information on bird families, field identification, habitat, wintering grounds, feeding habits and breeding biology. The well-written accounts, each accompanied by one or two stunning photographs, are somewhat fuller than those in an ordinary field guide, often providing information that the lay reader might not learn elsewhere. He tells us, for instance, that the Franklin's Gull's 14,000-kilometre round-trip to Peru and northern Chile is one of the longest trips made by any gull. That in hot weather, incubating avocets (male and female)

soak their belly feathers in water before sitting on the nest, thus cooling the eggs and keeping nest humidity high. That to cool themselves in desert heat, Turkey Vultures urinate on their legs, the evaporation of the "watery whitewash" actually lowering the birds' body temperature. We learn, too, that in winter chickadees "chill out" at night, their body temperatures dropping 10° to 12° C, yielding an energy saving of up to 23 per cent. The reader will soon look for these bits of bird lore, noting, in particular, a section in some accounts which the author labels "Trivia tidbit."

Looking through the book, it soon becomes apparent that Lynch is most attracted to prairie coulees and sloughs and their inhabitants. He gives substantial treatment to grebes; ducks (you'll enjoy his "bottoms-up" photo of three Northern Pintail drakes dabbling for food); raptors (the photo of Golden Eagle chicks looks suspiciously like it might have been taken in the South Saskatchewan River valley); shorebirds (the cover photo is of an American Avocet reflected in sky-blue water); gulls; terns; and owls (including delightful family shots of the fast disappearing Burrowing Owl); swallows and blackbirds.

I have one serious reservation about Lynch's book. The author should have given more consideration to truly representative grassland species, and to their vanishing environment. Despite the claim on the back cover that this is "much more than a bird guide," the potential purchaser should know that it is "something less than a bird guide" when it comes to prairie birds away from



trees and water. He does include Sharp-tailed and Sage grouse, Upland Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew, Burrowing and Snowy owls, Horned Lark and Western Meadowlark, but that's the end of the list. He omits the longspurs, Lark Buntings, pipits and sparrows, which together form the bulk of true grassland species. [The only sparrow included is the House Sparrow, an alien, unrelated to North American sparrows.] I looked in vain for Vesper, Savannah, Clay-coloured, Baird's, Le Conte's, or Sharp-tailed sparrows; Sprague's Pipits; Lark Buntings; McCown's or Chestnut-collared longspurs, and common to abundant migrants like the American Pipit, Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur. Any book dealing with prairie grassland birds should include most of these species, perhaps

at the expense of peripherals which he does include, like the Blue Jay, Belted Kingfisher, Evening Grosbeak and Pine Grosbeak. Given Lynch's photographic skill and experience, a few more weeks in southern Saskatchewan or Alberta would have provided him with the photos needed to balance his collection of prairie bird portraits and enhance the value of this beautiful book.

Very reasonably priced, *Wild Birds Across the Prairie* will make an ideal gift for friends and family members interested in birds, wildlife photography, or the continent's prairie grassland region.

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The world's largest wind-generated power project is in southern California. Over a 2-year period 13 sq. mi. of the 80-sq-mi. facility were surveyed for dead birds. Of the 182 carcasses found, 119 were raptors, including 16 Golden Eagles. Suggestions for reducing mortality include painting the windmill blades to make them more visible, installing noisemakers and eliminating small mammals. The last would require massive poisoning and habitat destruction. Since each energy source has some detriment to the environment, all of us should pay greater attention to energy conservation.