
NATURE LIBRARY

SPRING AGAIN AND OTHER POEMS

ROBERT NERO. 1998. Published by Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., P.O. Box 95, Postal Station O, Toronto, ON M4A 2M8. 82pp. \$9.95

Older members of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society (now Nature Saskatchewan) will have fond memories of Bob Nero, the knowledgeable and inspirational young American, who moved to Regina in 1955 after graduating from the University of Wisconsin. Before moving to Winnipeg, where he became Senior Ecologist with the Wildlife Branch, Department of Natural Resources, Bob was employed for a number of years at the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History and later at the University of Regina. A North American authority on both the Red-winged Blackbird and the Great Gray Owl, Bob has authored numerous technical papers and several major works, among them *The Great Gray Owl - phantom of the northern forest*, published by the Smithsonian Institute. But he has a gift, relatively rare among scientists; he also knows how to communicate his observations and deepest feelings in lucid prose and incisive poetry.

His first book of poetry, *Woman by the Shore and other poems*, appeared in 1990. It was followed in 1993 by *The Mulch Pile and other poems*. In 1994, Bob returned to prose. In *Lady Grayl, Owl with a Mission*, Bob tells the fascinating story of the baby Great Gray Owl which he rescued and raised to maturity. Bob and Lady Grayl (who will soon be 14 years old) have visited countless schools and public gatherings all over Manitoba, and were our special guests at the fortieth anniversary meeting of the Saskatoon Nature Society in September 1995.

Spring Again and other poems is Bob Nero's most recent publishing venture. In keeping with his earlier works, most of the poems are about some aspect of nature, closely observed. But his wife Ruth figures more prominently in these pages, and many of his best poems are tributes to the woman with whom he has shared his life. Has anyone expressed his love more feelingly than Bob in the little poem "Love"?

When finally
I am an old man
and tying my shoelaces
is a daily triumph
I shall think of you
and tremble
with the memory
of our touching
forever glad
that we took time
to love.

I'd like to call Bob, "The poet of moments", or should I say, "The momentous poet"? As in his previously published nature poems, he is at his best describing a precious moment: a black butterfly clinging to a screen; Purple Martins flying in the wind before a storm; fireflies in the garden; an early Mourning Dove's first mellow song; Buster, the family dog, floundering in three feet of new snow. Bob's poems shouldn't be read all at once. Savour them; read two or three at a sitting, perhaps outdoors in your garden. Recognize (jealously perhaps) his gift at recreating moments you too may have experienced but

couldn't express in words.

Readers should not be surprised at the breadth of this nature poet's interests and concerns. He writes on subjects as varied as the relationship between man and wife ("Revelations Of Ruth"), the change of seasons ("Light Trick"), aging ("New Leaves", "Winnipeg Morning"), household routine ("Agendas"), the child within us ("Possible Showers"), and nature's harshness seen in perspective ("Change of Heart"). Expect, too, traces of puckish humour. Lying on his back to watch martins high overhead, he wonders, "Will our neighbours think I've died?" A surprising number of this ornithologist's poems are about insects. In addition to the fireflies and butterfly mentioned above, his subjects include daddy-long-legs, carrion beetles, cabbage butterflies and ants.

As in any collection of poems, the reader will pick and choose among the offerings. I find a few of them prosaic, unnecessarily didactic, perhaps lacking the spark of creativity. But I have turned again and again to those I cherish. This little book, like the others that preceded it, contains a wealth of observed detail, feeling and memory. It is indeed a precious addition to Nero's library of "moments."

All of Bob Nero's poetry books and *Lady Grayl, Owl with a Mission* are available from his publisher, Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc.

Reviewed by *J. Frank Roy*, 650 Costigan Way, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7J 3R2



Caribou at Salters Lake

M.A. Gollop

WHALES

DAVID JONES. 1998. Whitecap Books, Vancouver/Toronto, vi+110 pp., 64 Color photos. \$24.95

"Whales," written by David Jones is a coffee table book, filled with exciting and often close-up photos of some of the world's largest whales. There are sixty-four of the best whale photos in this book, all taken by whale watchers in the field. In contrast, the text, which is well written and easy to read is more or less a modern summary of the facts about whale biology.

David starts by telling us all kinds of ways people have killed whales in the past and why they did these insensitive acts to the most interesting sea mammals. Fortunately, David didn't choose to accompany this first chapter with gory photos.

The rest of the book is about modern up to date whale biology and in this book you will learn something new. Each photo in the book is accompanied with a lengthy caption which usually tells the reader the name and where the photo was taken, and a little bit of whale biology.

"Whales" is not much of a field guide. David doesn't tell us where, when and

how to see and identify whales. But David did do his research on what is known about whale biology and gives us this information in easy to read and understandable text.

On the down side: It was apparent from the text that he wasn't there with the whales in the photos. The text to the photos was more research than experience. There was little to no story line relating his own experience and sometimes he either couldn't or wouldn't identify the whales in the photos, so his comments were about generalities of whale biology rather than about the photos.

Nevertheless, I thoroughly enjoyed the up-to-date biology information and would recommend this book to anyone to save them the library search that David did. As a coffee table book the photos are really great, and well worth the cost of the book.

Reviewed by *David Lawley*, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia (David is the author of "A Guide to Whale Watching in the Maritimes". Nimbus Publishing Ltd.)



A hawk has 1.5 million visual cells compared to 200,000 cells for a human in the same area of the retina.

The eggs of a Calliope Hummingbird average 12x8 mm compared to Trumpeter Swan's egg of 111x72 mm.

UNUSUAL BAT BEHAVIOUR

GERALD A. WILDE, Hinton, AB

On Friday August 2nd, 1996 near Flotten Lake in Meadow Lake Provincial Park I was spray painting an outdoor propane tank. It was a very warm day (30+ degrees C.) with no noticeable wind. The time was approximately 8:00pm. I was using a Tremclad paint in a small pressurized container. I had been spraying for a few minutes and the container was nearly empty.

A little brown bat flew into the vicinity and fluttered around my spraying can and then landed on the propane tank at the site of my latest application. I was amazed and stopped spraying, whereupon the bat left the tank, circled the area then disappeared into the adjacent spruce/pine forest. My first reaction was that there was something wrong with the bat, and perhaps I should make an attempt at capturing it as a possible rabies candidate. However the bat was no longer visible and I returned to the process of painting the tank. Immediately on starting application a second little brown bat approached from under the eaves of a nearby building. This bat also flew directly to the spray can and made attempts at landing on the can, whereby I

stopped spraying and the second bat then flew off into the adjacent forest. I now suspected the noise from the spray can was attracting the bats and although I continued to spray the tank no more bats came.

There were two different bats that were enticed to come out in broad daylight by the noise of the spray can. They came directly to the can and attempted to land on it. It appeared that the noise of the can was only attractive for a short period of time, probably resulting from a combination of the pressure in the can and the material of the propane tank. Although there are numerous bats in the vicinity and throughout the summer I have used a variety of spray paints, but this was the only incidence of this kind that I have noted.

(Editor's note: We were saddened to learn of the early death of Gerald Wilde. He was a naturalist who, through his passion, influenced others to care about nature. The above note was found among his papers ready to be sent to the Blue Jay.)



The Rufous and Calliope Hummingbirds both breed in Alberta. The Rufous has been recorded in neighbouring Saskatchewan 21 times compared to only once for the Calliope.