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## NEST BUILDING AND BIRD BEHAVIOR

N.E. COLLIAS and E.C. COLLIAS. 1984. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 336 pp. 64 b/w photos, 14 drawings, 2 appendices. Hardcover \$45.00, softcover \$16.50 (U.S. funds).

When a bird builds a nest it makes a more or less permanent record of its behavior - "frozen behavior". The type of nest built gives us important insights into the life of each species and clues to the birds ecological and evolutionary relationships. This book is promoted as the first comprehensive review of the scattered technical literature on this subject, one of the most critical periods in a bird's life.

Nest building behavior and nest types are examined in relation to attracting and keeping a mate; the breeding cycle; adapting to the stresses of the physical environment, competitors and predators; the special problems related to gregarious and colonial nesting. Unfortunately only 65 species of Saskatchewan birds are included and most of these are treated in a superficial manner by giving only meagre details about their nests and behavior. The authors rely heavily on their own studies of weaverbirds (Ploceidae) to explain how birds build their nests and how this ability develops. The bird families of the world and their nest types are listed in one appendix; sources of good photographs of bird nests are listed in the second.

If you are interested in this central aspect of bird biology you will find this book an important first source of academic information. — Reviewed by *Philip S. Taylor*, 1714 Prince of Wales Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7K 3E5

## THE BIRDWATCHER'S COMPANION — An encyclopedic handbook of North American birdlife

CHRISTOPHER LEAHY, illustrated by GORDON MORRISON. 1982 Hill and Wang, New York, 917 pp. \$38.95 (Canadian)

If the birders unable to articulate plausible reasons for their interest in birds, on a recent television program, had read Timothy Leahy's compendium, they would have had ready answers. As Leahy says, "looking at birds seems to yield equal pleasure at all levels of expertise."

Leahy provides a well-written, entertaining, informative overview of ornithology, with a strong historical and literary slant. There are delightful essays on birds in human imagination, and in human culture, including a list of the best poems about birds. There are comprehensive essays of 4 to 17 pages each on topics such as banding, bird feeding, bird houses, care of distressed birds, colour, conservation, display, distribution, endangered birds, evolution, falconry, flight, food, introduced birds, migrations, molt, names, navigation, nests, pests, size, sleep, song, speciation, swimming/diving, taxonomy, territory, and vision. Any one of these could have been submitted to *Scientific American* or *Audubon*.

The inquisitive will have many of their questions answered. How do crossbills open an unripe pine cone? How does an owl achieve silent flight? How does a hummingbird hover and fly backwards and where does it get the energy? How does a vulture cool off? Which passerine species walk rather than hop?

Some of the items are reminiscent of the *Guinness Book of Records*: The Elephant Bird of Madagascar laid 2-gallon eggs; a Pelican's pouch holds 3 gallons of water; there are 25,216 contour feathers in a Whistling Swan; a Bald Eagle nest may weigh 2 tons; a Gray Jay can stand 8 seconds on a red-hot stove; a Griffin Vulture may ascend to 36,000 feet; a Peregrine can fly 1350 miles in 24 hours; a swan may be flightless for 7 weeks while molting; male bird semen contains up to 3 million spermatozoa per ejaculation. There are helpful notes on pronunciation and an excellent bibliography to guide further study.

This book is not only an invaluable reference source for any teacher or writer, but it is written with verve and is really fun to browse in. I found only a few errors. If you don't buy a copy, you must at least borrow one. — Reviewed by *C. Stuart Houston*, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8

## THE WORLD OF ROBERT BATEMAN

ROBERT BATEMAN. 1985. 85 full-colour paintings with artist's commentaries. For release in October. \$49.00 from Nature Canada Bookshop, 75 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario. K1P 6G1

## WILDERNESS WAYS: SASKATCHEWAN POEMS

By the late TOM WHITE.  
38 pp., paper \$3.50.

Pamela White has made this volume of 36 poems from the pen of her late husband available to members of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society through The Blue Jay Bookshop, P.O. Box 1121, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4P 3B4. Reading these four-line rhyming poems one is struck anew by Tom's sensitivity for the land and the wild ones of Saskatchewan, and his scorn for their despoilers. It is a book we all need. Proceeds will be added to our Conservation Fund. Tom White is the author of SNHS Special Publication 14, SASKATCHEWAN COURGAR: ELUSIVE CAT, price \$5.00 (paper).

## THE SPIRIT OF THE HUCKLEBERRY; SENSUOUSNESS IN HENRY THOREAU

VICTOR CARL FRIESEN. 1984. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press. 145 pp. Notes.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) is a writer familiar to many readers of the *Blue Jay* for his having written *Walden* (1854), a journal, and many well-known sentences and phrases, the origin of which may be unknown or forgotten, such as "In short, all good things are wild and free," "hears a different drummer" and "in wildness is the preservation of the world." Friesen has re-read all of Thoreau's writings to write this study (a revision of work he did for his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees) on the sensuous qualities of Thoreau's prose which he believes account for the essential Thoreau.

Friesen became acquainted with Thoreau's work while living in a small teacherage near Fort Carlton and feeling himself surrounded by the sights and sounds of nature, much as Thoreau had been amidst nature in and near Concord, Massachusetts. His interest in the lover of huckleberries has not diminished; however, it may culminate in this affectionate study. He quotes often, perhaps too often because many of the brief quotations are annoying interpolations which add nothing to Friesen's text (e.g. "very good," and "ovation").

Thoreau found that his greatest immersion in nature occurred in swamps and in some passages about them can be found appeals to the five common senses of man. But most often his sentences appeal to one or two senses, as in this one from *Walden*: "When I made most noise he [a Barred Owl] would stretch out his neck, and erect his neck feathers, and open his eyes wide; but their lids soon fell again, and he began to nod." Friesen reminds us that Thoreau was a better botanist than ornithologist, notwithstanding the previous sentence and the fact that the "Peterson" system of bird identification based on color pattern and outline originates with Thoreau and not Ernest T. Seton.

The claims for Thoreau's sensuousness are persuasive, and besides style Friesen discusses briefly his economic views and scientific interests, and that cornerstone of Thoreau's philosophy: simplicity. Friesen's use of the present tense is an apt reminder that the writings are as vital today as they were in the nineteenth century. His straightforward declarative sentences help him to make his points clearly. Alas, neither he nor his editor saw fit to provide an index to this brief, attractive book. You will need the 1906 edition of *Walden* to pursue Friesen's references to Thoreau's work.

There is a new edition of Thoreau's writings which may interest you, now being published by Princeton University Press.

As well, there is the informative, entertaining *Annotated Walden* (Bramhall House, 1970) and the biography by Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (Dover, 1970), to add to Friesen's book, if you wish to renew (or begin) a familiarity with this man who found great pleasure in spending time in the summer going huckleberrying. Thoreau took satisfaction in his belief that "there can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of nature and has his senses still." — Reviewed by *Marshall Gilliland*, 902 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0K1

## BLACK WOLF: THE LIFE OF ERNEST THOMPSON SETON

Betty Keller of Langley, British Columbia, has written "a perceptive and insightful biography of this colourful eccentric who once played so large a part in the lives of North American boys", as the dust cover correctly states. Keller has done her homework. The book is well written and thoroughly researched.

She has chosen appropriate material from Seton's own autobiography, *Trail of an Artist-Naturalist*, from his second wife's *By a Thousand Fires*, from John Henry Wadland's scholarly thesis, and from numerous archival sources. She deserves great credit for her sleuthing, especially for unearthing the unpublished manuscripts of Seton's brothers, William S. Thompson and Dr. Arthur S. Thompson, written respectively in 1923 and 1940.

Seton was an unusually talented man with a complex personality. Keller deals openly and fairly with his idiosyncrasies, spinning a life story of unusual interest. Seton had a life-long hatred of his father, but from his brothers' unpublished writings and other sources, it is clear that this was inappropriately exaggerated by Seton's vivid imagination. Seton's second wife

described him as "a strange combination of exact scientist and imaginative romancer".

Seton was one of the most successful authors and public lecturers of his time. His animal stories, a composite of his own observations, became runaway best sellers, and are still favorites today. As an artist, he not only illustrated his own books with delightful sketches, but published *Studies in the Art Anatomy of Animals*, contributed 1000 drawings to the *Century Encyclopedia*, and illustrated Frank M. Chapman's *Bird Life*.

Seton was also a scientist, yet Keller's foreword frankly disavows any attempt to explore Seton's "place in the scientific world". In spite of this disclaimer, Keller does an adequate job of recognizing the importance of, and the recognition given, Seton's two-volume *Life Histories of Northern Mammals* in 1909 and his four volume *Lives of Game Animals* in 1925-28. She should have offered the reader another paragraph or two to explain the importance of Seton's unrivalled legacy of bird distribution records as southern Manitoba was first being settled, and the changes in the next ten years. Seton's writings, after all, offer us the best documentation now available for the disappearance of the Passenger Pigeon, the influx of the Mourning dove, Greater Prairie Chicken and Eastern Bluebird with settlement, and the rapid decline of the Upland Sandpiper and Sprague's Pipit as land was broken by the plough. He rescued from oblivion the important bird notes of George F. Guernsey of Fort Qu'Appelle and found the first-ever nest of the Philadelphia Vireo near his homestead within what is now Saskatchewan.

Seton's Woodcraft Indians grew to 100,000 members in eight years, in spite of a loose and inefficient organization. His woodcraft program was incorporated without adequate acknowledgement into Robert Baden-Powell's book, *Scouting for Boys*. In spite of the fact that the Woodcraft Indians continued alongside the Boy Scouts for a few years, Seton was for five years the

Chief Scout of the new movement in the United States. Keller also tells us of Seton's dealings with other important figures including Theodore Roosevelt and John Burroughs. She describes his interesting trip to the subarctic beyond Great Slave Lake in 1907 with E. A. Preble.

Keller does not inform us of the attempt by Seton and Miller Christy to publish the Andrew Graham — Thomas Hutchins 1770's manuscript of bird observations at Hudson Bay, nor does she note the strange fact that Seton's death was ignored by the *Journal of Mammalogy* whereas an appreciative obituary was published in *The Auk*. She is incorrect in stating that *Trail of an Artist-Naturalist* was not republished after the war; I own a copy of the 1946 printing.

This attractive book is appropriately illustrated and almost free from typographical errors. Not only is it a "good read," but it is now the definitive biography of one of the most interesting naturalists of all time. — Reviewed by C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8

## THE NORTHERN NATURALIST

E. OTTO HOHN 1983 Lone Pine Media Productions Limited, 440, 10113-104 Street, Edmonton. 173 pp. 33 photos, 2 maps. \$12.50

With the title and an aspen leaf in silver on its forest green cover, this book is physically very attractive. While the layout is generally good, one obvious design flaw is the main map; on it the small area described in the text is almost lost in the binding. The photographs are in general quite ordinary and few are clear; they add little to the verbal content. I also have reservations about the text — reluctantly, because, especially for parkland readers, the topics discussed are likely of immediate personal interest.

Hohn's naturalist credentials are impeccable. Birdwatcher since childhood and 25-year owner of a small acreage in the Cooking Lake moraine country east of Edmonton, Hohn knows the "Cooking Lake Uplands" well. Though this is already a small area, Hohn limits his scope still further by describing only the species he finds "most interesting." For transient species, he reminisces also about his experiences in the Arctic and Alaska, in England and South America. The result is that, while the anecdotes and asides are usually interesting, an already loose narrative meanders through a random mixture of historical, geographical and biographical details. Hohn's major writing problem here is his lack of variation in pacing or style, and despite its promise, the book is never hard to put down.

In the first section, "Sketches of Some Animals," the author describes mostly his own varied experiences. He is at his most vivid here and the reader does catch his enthusiasm. The second section, "Wildlife Through the Year," is divided into four seasonal "chapters," and one indeed expects these pages to follow the annual cycle. Hohn begins with Horned Lark, Ruffed and Sharp-tailed grouse — reasonable choices — and carries on with partridge and pheasant, but ties neither of the latter to spring at all. Golden Eagle is not even treated here in its relation to Alberta but rather to the Arctic, and where it fits into Cooking Lake's spring is not clear. "Summer" abounds in references to migration, to "mid-April" and "spring," and the same inconsistencies continue throughout fall and winter.

I do not quarrel with the contents of these species descriptions in themselves, for Hohn's casual, anecdotal, and generally competent if somewhat soporific style does make for relaxed and easy reading. But, why not dispense with the seasonal distinctions and use some other arrangement entirely — a daily or weekly journal form, for example, where the seasons need be only

as important as events make them and where the reader's expectations are mostly met?

What becomes a continuously distracting feature of this otherwise innocuous book is the large number of errors. They begin early, on the page containing Hohn's biography, and continue in abundance to the last page. Page 16 for example, has five errors in two paragraphs, and the three-page index contains at least 38 easily-found errors and/or major inconsistencies. Some, (e.g. kingfisher, billed — the correct name is Belted Kingfisher) spelling errors and wrong page numbers are obviously proofing failures, mostly revealing someone's carelessness. Incorrect names such as "gopher, Richardson's ground squirrel," "duck, goldeneye" and "warbler, yellow-throated common" blend with incomplete ones like "avocet," "dowitcher" and "pelican" and names which are accurate. The resulting mix leaves a naive reader with no idea of the correct names of the animals mentioned.

Hohn's bird names are particularly annoying. He professes to use the "American Ornithologist's Union's" 1982 'official' vernacular names as his reference for "new names," but provides only an incomplete tabulation of those names for species included — for which he uses only the old names in his text. And, his failure to follow the common practice of capitalizing English species names makes it difficult to find birds' names on a page.

Reminiscences theoretically form a logical base for this type of book, but it is important that one gets a sense of the significance of events. In this book, at least for this reader, that does not happen. The book is aptly named — it is the naturalist himself who is best revealed. Nature remains stubbornly in the shadows. — Reviewed by *Mary D. Gilliland*, 902 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0K1