

# Book Reviews

## ZOOLOGY

### **Attracting Backyard Wildlife: A Guide for Nature-Lovers**

By Bill Merilees. Whitecap Books, Vancouver/Toronto. 160 pp., illus. \$12.95.

This is a splendid, uncomplicated book which delivers to the reader exactly what the title promises. Bill Merilees has always been a nature-lover, building bird houses and feeders with his father as a youngster and banding birds as a teenager. Now he is a professional biologist with a Master's degree in Outdoor Recreation and Education. Although Merilees lives in Nanaimo with a backyard full of local plants and animals, the information in this book is carefully tailored to conditions found across Canada; squirrel lovers in Toronto will find it as useful as apartment dwellers in Vancouver, who are told how to grow water lilies in a barrel or provide sweetened water for House Finches.

Merilees makes it clear that although a home owner may aspire to a variety of bird species — he himself had 12 different species visit his feeder one winter and he gives detailed instructions on how to attempt this for each season — there is joy also in attracting butterflies (with garden flowers) and bats (with bat houses) and toads (with toad lights). He even gives instructions on how to build nesting boxes for House Sparrows and Starlings for those inner city dwellers who are likely to have few other kinds of birds. Merilees is a practical person, however, and equally open to all creatures; he likes garter snakes because they eat slugs, and keeps Great Blue Herons near his house by stocking his fish pond with a supply of goldfish bought in the

store. He observes that the white individuals are eaten first, then the orange, and finally the black ones in an interesting example of survival of the fittest.

Merilees comes out strongly against cats, which can quickly wipe out the wildlife one has set out to encourage. House cats are the primary killer of chickadees, and kill on average one small mammal or bird a month. Cats kill hundreds of millions of wild birds and mammals each year. He insists that cats be kept out of the backyard with cat-proof fences or by trapping.

The author also cautions against the use of insecticides for insects and herbicides for weeds. These poisons usually remain in the environment and build up in the food chain, sometimes weakening or even killing individual animals.

If there is a second edition of this useful book, I hope it will get rid of the few examples of sexist language such as backyard gardener . . . he, and butcher . . . he. We read that "Ever since the dawn of time man has feared creatures of the night. As ancient men huddled around their campfires, they heard strange squeaks, hoots, and howls." Were the women unafraid of these strange noises that they too did not seek the fire? We are left to wonder.

ANNE INNIS DAGG

Independent Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo Ontario N2L 3G1

### **Encyclopedia of the Animal World — Birds — The Waterbirds**

By Robin Kerrod, Facts on File, New York. 96 pp., illus. U.S.\$17.95; \$21.95 in Canada.

This volume is one in a series of 12 that encompass the whole animal kingdom, but concentrate heavily on birds and mammals. It is most suitable for the older child. Arranged in systematic order, it devotes a few pages to each of the major bird families. The author describes the basic characteristics of family members such as their feeding, breeding, courtship behaviour, and so on. This is done in a language that is both readable and precise and that conveys the essential points in a clear, absorbable fashion.

The book is roughly 50% illustration and 50% text. The photographs used are excellent. Not only have they been chosen to illustrate the bird itself but also to highlight some important characteristic. Artwork is used to supplement the photos. This work, done by several artists, is also first class. Coloured illustrations again depict the individual species and black-and-white vignettes explain patterns of behaviour.

The author, even though he uses North American common names, is refreshingly non-partisan. Birds from all parts of the world are used





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