

her guests to all the places of interest and teaches them about the ecology, etc. But summer passes quickly and she is alone again to write, paint and update her records and journal. During the fall she flies out to give lectures and to promote her books.

This is a book that teaches one about a life of solitude with nature, about being self-sufficient, and about

one of the unspoilt wilderness areas of British Columbia, of which there are fewer and fewer. I thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt a great deal and recommend it to all nature lovers.

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Choosing Wildness: My Life Among the Ospreys

By Claude Arbour, translated by Joan Irving. 2008. Greystone Books, #201-2323 Quebec Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V5T 4S7 Canada. 242 pages. 24.95 CAD Paper.

Choosing Wildness is a book for ornithologists and conservationists to savour. For 20 years, Claude Arbour lived year-round at Lac Villiers, 47° north latitude, in 2500 square kilometres of pristine wilderness far north of Joliette, Quebec. When Arbour first arrived, a pack of wolves occupied the adjacent forest, along with raccoons, pine martens and beaver. Supplies to last the six-month winter isolation had to be transported by boat to the cabin each fall. Emergency travel in winter, if required, was by snowplane or airplane, but during freezeup and breakup, even these modes were impossible for weeks on end. His beloved dog team provided winter transportation; human neighbours were 32 and 40 km distant. On one level, Arbour's tale is one of wilderness survival.

The book, however, is far more than that. It is also an account of the diligence and stewardship of a dedicated naturalist. Aided by sustained contributions from one hundred individual supporters of La Fondation Naturaliste de Lac Villiers, Claude made careful studies of the region's flora and fauna, including over 200 species of birds, and sent each supporter a written report each season. As the subtitle intimates, ospreys soon became one of his main projects. Early on, he built the first of nearly a hundred osprey platforms; the next summer the first of about 200 osprey nestlings fledged; subsequently, between 15 and 20 young fledged each year. One summer he logged 400 hours watching the nearest osprey nest to determine the dates when eggs were laid and later hatched, and when the chicks fledged. He recorded the number and size of fish brought to the osprey nest. Once, when a male osprey disappeared and two of the three chicks had died of starvation, Claude delivered food twice daily for the female and surviving chick, which he banded before it fledged. Once, he threw a fish out over the lake and the female osprey caught it on the fly. Sixty-one of his large osprey platforms persisted until his final survey in 2006; 19 breeding pairs were present that summer.

Injured ospreys and bald eagles were cared for and rehabilitated over long periods, some brought to him by the Union québécoise pour la réhabilitation des oiseaux de proie. Raptor and prey interactions he observed included a bald eagle that chased a Canada goose. Arbour contributed many observations to the provin-

cial database and provides accounts of spotted sandpipers, bald eagles, ravens, pileated woodpeckers, and sightings of a rare prothonotary warbler and Cape May warbler. He also observed a semipalmated plover with three young; however, the location makes it highly improbable that the birds nested locally.

Claude eventually cleared 12 km of winter dog-team and summer hiking trails leading from his cabin to adjacent lakes. One project, building platforms to assist loons in using nests away from the wash of the occasional fisherman's motorboat, was not successful. Sometimes he took extraordinary measures. When the dam at the bottom of the lake burst, Claude placed 150 bags of sand to plug the holes and thus saved the lake's population of northern pike. He also spent 90 hours mapping water depths throughout the lake.

There is more than just a hint of romance. Danielle, a nurse who shared his love of birds, came to visit him. Claude was extremely fortunate that she returned and stayed to share his joy of observing bountiful nature. She was willing to share all the hardships – and pleasures – of an extremely primitive life style. For example, Claude's routine was to have a daily bath in the lake until it froze over. His outdoor privy had a special winter seat sculpted from an insulating material that reflected heat immediately upon contact. He cut 35 cords of wood for fuel each winter. The couple raised two sons in the wilderness; Danielle covered their school lessons in two hours a day, four days a week, until they reached high school age and moved out to Joliette for their schooling. Both boys became self-reliant and trustworthy.

What had Claude and Danielle achieved? Useful data were collected. Platforms encouraged the Osprey population to increase. People were educated to value the wilderness and some shotguns were put away for good as television documentaries about Claude's work were shown across Quebec. Sadly, as the years went by, forested hilltops within view of their cabin were clear-cut and a road reached Lac Villiers, ending their isolation. But on the plus side, the new road allowed Claude and Danielle to take an annual breeding bird survey during their final four years of residence there.

I wish a map had been included, but anyone with a computer can rectify this deficiency by clicking Google Maps, then typing in Saint-Michel-Des-Saints (at the north end of Quebec Highway 131) and then Lac Villiers – in the wilderness about 50 km farther to the

north. The Epilogue, added especially for this translation, tells how Claude was forced to move back south in August 2006 after he became partially disabled by multiple sclerosis.

Rob Sanders of Greystone Books deserves commendation for agreeing to publish this English translation of a book that first appeared in French in 2000. The

compelling story is told in sixty short chapters, averaging only four pages each. An ideal length for a bedside table, much preferable to watching the grisly television news before one turns out the light.

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Return to Warden's Grove: Science, Desire, and the Lives of Sparrows

By Christopher Norment. 2008. University of Iowa Press, 119 West Park Road, 100 Kuhl House, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1000. Hardcover. 215 pages. 26 USD.

I was attracted to this book because Chris Norment and I share a love of maps, of reading, of banding birds, of subarctic Canadian history, and a special fondness for Harris's Sparrows. We both admired Marguerite Heydweiler Baumgartner, whose 1933 studies of Harris's Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows near Churchill, Manitoba, helped inspire this book. Indeed, *Warden's Grove* is a worthy response to Baumgartner's challenge that "some intrepid young naturalist will elect to fill in the many remaining gaps in our knowledge of this bird of mystery." Norment has produced a fascinating book about studying Harris's Sparrow in what was then one of the remotest spots in the Canadian barren-land wilderness.

Warden's Grove is part of a series of "sightline books", classed by Iowa University Press as "literary nonfiction" – hence, not as science. Personally, I would have preferred a bit more science and less introspection, more hard facts and fewer attempts at self-analysis, but I have already seen two other reviews that praised what I disliked.

Norment first experienced Warden's Grove when he overwintered there in 1977-78, as a member of a six-man expedition that canoed 2200 miles from the Yukon to Hudson Bay. His interest in Harris's Sparrows and romantic recollections of the unrivalled isolation of Warden's Grove led him to return there for three successive summers, 1989 to 1991. The book describes the adventures and difficulties of living in remote Grizzly Bear country, some 310 floatplane

miles from Yellowknife and at that time 180 miles from the nearest human neighbour. This book was written more than a decade after his research, yet he fails to tell us that diamond mines are today just outside the margin of his "nearest-neighbour circle."

While *Warden's Grove* vividly describes the difficulties in research on Harris's Sparrows, it also shares interesting facts about a bird which, in 1931, was the last species in North America to have its nest and eggs discovered. Among other things, we learn that the eggs, laid by females with an average weight of 33.7 g, have an average mass of 3.09 g. The average height of vegetation at the nest is 47.6 cm. Parental feeding rates of the Harris's Sparrow approach 13 trips per hour, compared to 16 for the White-crowned Sparrow. Norment's studies, however, provide no clue to the cause of the decline in wintering Harris's Sparrow populations in the U.S. mid-west. Nor can Norment come up with an answer for how the nestling sparrows stayed almost completely insect free, while he and his assistant were plagued by large numbers of blackflies.

I admire Norment's writing skills. I share his admiration of the Harris's Sparrow, which he describes as unremarkable yet miraculous. I share his concern that our generation lives mostly in a world of noise; that we seek to obliterate time, distance, silence and space; that we demand immediate gratification. *Warden's Grove* is all the more interesting because the wilderness and isolation will soon be no more.

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The Archaeology of Animal Bones – Second Printing

By Terry O'Connor. 2008. Texas A&M University Press, John H. Lindsey Building, Lewis Street 4354 TAMU College Station, Texas 77843-4354. 206 pages. 29.95 USD Paper.

Coincident with reviewing this book, an archaeology class was for the first time using the skeletal collection which I curate, to identify bones from a Mi'kmaq midden. Therefore, I have been getting a pleasant overload of zooarchaeology from two fronts – a thoroughly enjoyable experience. This review, of course, focuses only on Terry O'Connor's ability to convey information and passion about the discoveries, extractions

and problems associated with interpreting past peoples' lives by the animal bones which they left behind.

At just over 200 pages, O'Connor's book is a sampler of many aspects of zooarchaeology; because of its size, it simply cannot go into detail in the chosen topics. The author's own experiences, many of which are appropriately included in these pages, are a valuable contribution and give the book a sense of reality.

The preface has a prosaic passage, "This book is not intended to be a didactic account that explains *how* animal bones ought to be examined and studied.