

## MISCELLANEOUS

**The North Runner**

By R. D. Lawrence. 2003. Natural Heritage Books, P.O. Box 95, Station O, Toronto, Ontario M4A 2M8 Canada. 288 pages. \$22.95 Cloth.

*The North Runner*, R. D. Lawrence's eleventh book, was first published in 1979 and re-issued in 2003, and it covers events in his life in the mid 1950s. A "North Runner" is a northern sled dog that made possible the harvesting of furs as well as carrying people and supplies across Canada's northern lands. As well these northern sled dogs contributed to successful expeditions to both the North and South Poles.

The North Runner of this book – Yukon by name – was part wolf and part malemute. Malemutes were bred to pull heavy loads all day in incredibly cold weather. Although stubborn and independent, with early training they could become wonderful companions to their owner.

Lawrence, born in 1921 of an English father – a journalist – and a Spanish mother, spent his somewhat lonely childhood in Spain. In his early teens he fought with the antifascists against Franco, then escaped to England. There he enlisted in World War 2 and fought in Europe and North Africa. The senselessness of war hardened him towards death and caused him to withdraw from personal relationships and friendships.

After the war, with his love of nature, he studied biology at Cambridge University for a few years but became impatient with the method of teaching. Tired of people and cities, he emigrated to Canada in the mid-1950s where he worked at a variety of jobs in Toronto and saved enough to purchase a homestead of a 100 acres near Fort Francis in northwestern Ontario. He obtained a timber contract locally which he proposed to fill from the woods on his land. Needing dogs to pull a sled loaded with timber, he obtained three huskies but needed a strong leader. A local Indian brought him a half-starved, dirty, angry dog which the Indian controlled with a club. Strangely, Lawrence found himself drawn to this snarling creature. He purchased it and using food and soft words gradually won this fierce, angry dog's trust. Eventually the joy and affection which each showed the other broke down Lawrence's antipathy to the world.

**Seasons of the Arctic**

By Paul Nicklen and Hugh Brody. 2000. Greystone Books, Vancouver, British Columbia [in the United States: Sierra Club Books (Random House Inc.)]. 102 pages. U.S. \$32.

There is no shortage of books about the Arctic, nor of photographs, but this collection of photographs is exceptional. Paul Nicklen has lived in several areas of the Arctic since 1971, and his love for the wildlife and scenery is apparent in every shot. How has he managed to find animals in such unique situations as

Together they would journey across Canada in a 'battered Chevrolet' and with Yukon's curiosity about everything, Lawrence found himself increasingly aware of the details of his surroundings. He describes with great sensitivity, the beauty of the natural world around him. One is made to feel part of this world as he tells of bird songs, rushing water, blinding blizzards, sunlit meadows, leaping hares and even a tornado, all in vivid, beautiful prose.

Out hunting for meat one day with Yukon, he found himself in the path of a moose which was acting in a demented manner. The dog attacked and brought down this crazed animal which Lawrence was forced to shoot. Guessing the meat unfit to eat, Lawrence took tissue samples to seek out possible cause for the animal's behaviour. Later he examined the tissues under his microscope and discovered worms in the brain tissues which he thought probably caused the moose's unnatural behaviour.

There is a vivid description of Yukon chasing a marauding bear through the woods. Despite Lawrence's search, the dog seemed to have gone. Three days later a bloodied, torn dog banged on the window much to Lawrence's joy and relief. He realized what a friend and companion this dog had become.

After traveling to northern British Columbia to discover the source of the River Nass and spending a winter up there in isolation, he decided to drive with Yukon, to Winnipeg where he found a job as a journalist. There he met and fell in love with a librarian named Jean. Faced with a dilemma of married life and work in the city versus life in the wild with Yukon, he returned to try and sort things out at his old homestead where Yukon solved the problem in his own way.

A further source of information about Lawrence can be found in his 1994 memoir *The Green Hills Beyond* which explains fully in his own words when and why he decided to become a "nature watcher". Sadly he died in October 2003.

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the heads of two tiny polar bear cubs peering at the camera over the back of their mother, so close you can see only part of her back? Or three sandpipers neatly surrounded by discarded caribou antlers, reflecting in still water? The book cover shows the head of a wet polar bear, shaking like a dog, with every drop of water silhouetted against the sky.

Nicklen has ranged the Arctic for years, sometimes alone for three months at a time, capturing extraordi-

nary and unconventional images such as a time-lapse shot of stars moving around the fixed North Star. Hugh Brody, who wrote the short introduction, is a poet, and his prose shows it. He speaks of Nicklen's "immaculate portraits of the natural world". There are no human beings in any photographs, but they are represented by the title "Seasons", which does not refer to our usual four, but the six seasons northern people use to divide the year – an early spring and

early autumn season with their own names added. We may think the Arctic is a bare, barren place, but these portraits illustrate the teeming life above and below the snow, land and water which sustains a flourishing ecosystem. It is a beautiful book.

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### When the Wild Comes Leaping Up: Personal Encounters with Nature

Edited by David Suzuki. 2003. Greystone Books, Vancouver, British Columbia. 235 pages. \$22.95.

This latest anthology of nature writings, edited by Canada's pre-eminent scientist and writer David Suzuki, brings together new essays by a breadth of writers. Some of the authors were familiar to me as nature essayists (Diane Ackerman, Rick Bass, Sharon Butala, Wade Davis, Bill McKibben, David Quammen, David Suzuki); others were familiar authors, though not as nature writers (Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley); while the rest were entirely new (Robert Drewe, Richard Flanagan, Jennifer Potter, Beth Powning, David Reynolds, David Adams Richards). Geographically, they hail from Canada, the USA, Great Britain and Australia.

Suzuki asked the writers to "share an experience that moved them or changed them in some way and that occurred in the natural world" because he argues that preservation of the wild is ultimately about people connecting with nature in a spiritual way, rather than relying on intellectual arguments for biological diversity or economic value.

Many of the stories are woven around moments or events in the authors' lives that influenced them trem-

endously. Rick Bass contemplates when, how and why these moments occur: "Who knows what moments – what complications of the physical and the mental – of landscape and story – conspire to ignite the sparks of enduring memory, formative or pivotal or living memories?" And do these moments only occur in pristine wilderness or can they occur in the humanised environment? The essays by the British authors, set in a small park, a country lane and a commons – tamer versions of the natural world than the Montana where Bass lives – suggest that nature's power can be felt in both. Diane Ackerman agrees, writing about how backyard animals such as deer, squirrels and birds become the entryway to the bustling world of nature for many suburbanites and travellers.

All of the authors write with passion and eloquence, and because of the personal nature of the essays, most readers will find themselves connecting with the stories. This book is an enjoyable antidote to the important, though often depressing, ones detailing destruction of the natural world.

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### NEW TITLES

#### Zoology

\***Birds of Chile.** 2003. By A. Jaramillo. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 240 pages. U.S. \$29.95 paper, U.S. \$55. cloth.

\***Birds of Manitoba.** 2003. Edited by Peter Taylor et al. Manitoba Naturalists Society, Winnipeg, Manitoba. viii + 503 pages.

\***Freshwater Fishes of Manitoba.** By K. Stewart and D. Watkinson. 2004. University of Manitoba Press, St. John's College, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2M5 Canada. 360 pages. \$29.95 paper, \$44.95 cloth.

**Hawks and Owls of the Great Lakes Region & Eastern North America.** 2004. By C. Earley. Firefly Books Ltd., 3680 Victoria Park Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M2H 3K1 Canada. 128 pages. \$16.95 paper, \$24.95 cloth.

\***Owls of the World.** 2003. By J. Duncan. Key Porter Books, Toronto, Ontario. 319 pages. \$60 cloth.

\***Raptors of Eastern North America.** 2003. By Brian Wheeler. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 456 pages. U.S. \$45 cloth.

\***Raptors of Western North America.** 2003. By Brian Wheeler. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 580 pages. U.S. \$49.50

\***Wild Mammals of North America, Biology, Management and Conservation (2nd Edition).** 2003. Edited by G. Feldhamer, B. Thompson, and J. Chapman. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2715 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland. xiii + 1216 pages. U.S. \$175 cloth.

#### Botany

\***Alpine Plants of North America: An Encyclopedia of Mountain Flowers from the Rockies to Alaska.** 2003. Edited by Graham Nicholls and Rick Lupp. Timber Press. 344 pages. \$49.95 cloth.