

# Book Reviews

## ZOOLOGY

### **Damselflies of Alberta: Flying Neon Toothpicks in the Grass**

By John Acorn. 2005. University of Alberta Press, Ring House 2, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E1 Canada. 156 pages. Can \$29.95.

I have a very strong interest in entomology, but no particular interest in Odonates, save for collecting the odd one for my odonatologist colleague. This small book has served to enlighten me and further my interest; I will look at damselflies more closely now.

In the bulk of the Preface, Acorn waxes about the restraints of scientific writing and laments about how dull it is to him. He prefers to write “in a frank and personal fashion, admitting to one’s influences, desires, uncertainties and dislikes.” However, much of “his” style (frank, admitting to influences and uncertainties) is the basis of scientific writing as well. Literature must be directed to an audience, and I don’t think an odonatologist would find “dull” the scientific writing directed to his or her guild. A quick look at the bibliography reveals that the vast majority of works consulted for Acorn’s book is from the scientific literature.

Having read the book, and having seen episodes of Acorn’s TV show and his video interpretations at the Tyrell Museum, I believe Acorn is a wonderful author for children (e.g. “A big, mean, scary female water spider” is part of one caption in this damselfly book), but I don’t think that writing for children alone is the intended extent of his scope. Acorn’s goal is to write for the general public and to get people interested in natural history, and this book helps in that. However, the author does not give credit to people’s intelligence...he changes names of structures on the damselflies simply because they sound too much like jar-

gon to him. I’m at a personal crossroads on this point – I firmly applaud Acorn’s message of natural history education for everyone, but to me, his writing style actually detracts from getting the most out of the information in the book. For example, I did not find the limericks at the beginning of each species description at all interesting, humorous or otherwise worth the space. I believe one must write appropriately for the intended audience; there is no such thing as a book for all ages. And I do not enjoy reading books that seem to be written for children.

Technically, the book has very good points, as well as a few unfortunate oversights. The book is of a convenient size, suitable for taking in the field. The photography, while not stunningly appealing, is still quite vivid. It is not clear why there is a photograph of a dragonfly nymph in the introductory chapter, and none of a damselfly nymph; the latter ultimately does appear later in the book. Acorn describes the *necessity* of using a 10x lens to be able to identify damselflies in the field, yet there are no photographs of *any* of the features at this magnification in the book (there are some useful line drawings at the back of the book). However, this small book *is* packed with a lot of useful information on identification, ecology and behaviour of Alberta’s damselflies, and for that reason alone would make a worthwhile addition to a naturalist’s library.

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## BOTANY

### **Flower Guide for Holiday Weekends**

By E. Larsen and B. Roots. 2005. National Research Council Canada, 1200 Montreal Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0R6 Canada. vii + 149 pages. Paper.

This book is arranged to cover three key holiday weekends. The choice of weekends works equally well for both United States and Canada [Victoria Day/Memorial Day, Canada Day/Independence Day, Civic Holiday/Labour Day]. This is a good concept that will be most helpful to novices and visitors. By choosing your date you can readily see which of the common,

showy flowers are in bloom and thus narrow your search for the identity of a flower.

Each species is covered by a good strong narrative in layman’s terms. While this text is non-scientific it is enlightening and helpful. This is accompanied by one to four photos of the plant, its flowers, seed, etc. The photos are top quality and are artistically set in the book, adding to its charm. The edges of the pages are coloured yellow, orange or blue to make it easy to pick the weekend. The book is relatively small so will slip easily into a pack or pocket.