

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

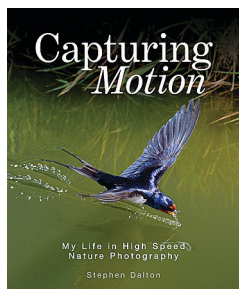
**Strange Sea Creatures.** By Erich Hoyt. 2020. Firefly Books. 192 pages and 80 colour photographs, 35.00 CAD, Cloth.

**Capturing Motion: My Life in High-Speed Nature Photography.** By Stephen Dalton. 2020. Firefly Books. 192 pages and 80 colour photographs, 35.00 CAD, Cloth.

The visions and ambitions of photographers, amateur and professional, are limitless. The exponential rate of technological advances on several different fronts has enabled those with the creative ideas and ambition to bring them increasingly to fruition. The two books discussed here each, in their different ways, underscore the point. On the face of it, these books are similar—both are, in the best sense, large-size picture books; both reveal aspects of the natural world that are unavailable to most of us; both seek not only to enhance awareness of that world, but to encourage us to engage in it, to appreciate it, simply to learn about it, in new ways.

The two books differ in several ways as well. Erich Hoyt's *Strange Sea Creatures* is almost purely photographic, with almost every page containing a large view of some usually tiny, exotic, never-seen-before (by most of us, I mean) creature that is given a name—when known—and brief description. Hoyt provides the expert commentary, half-a-dozen photographers the wonderful photos. These alien deep sea creatures are presented mostly on their own, against black backdrops, in three sections: The Blackwater Vertical Migrators, Masters of the Language of Light, and The Bottom Dwellers. Our role is primarily as viewers, marvelling at their strangeness and beauty.

In contrast, Stephen Dalton's *Capturing Motion* presents a lifetime engaged in a process he pretty much invented: taking photos of animals—insects, birds, reptiles, and amphibians—in motion, often in flight, freeze-framing them in clean, crisp, stop-action shots that were impossible to make until he diligently and systematically developed the methods. In three introductory sections, Dalton recounts how he



developed early on an interest in nature and photography, the daunting technical challenges of equipping himself for action photography long before the ease of digital cameras, and practical notes for photographers. The bulk of the book is six themed chapters charting his interests over time and place. Dalton's incredible photos and the stories behind them are shown in two-page spreads. The images throughout, taken from the 1970s through 2019, are amazing as technical achievements and studies of animal-in-motion behaviours. We can only marvel at both the techniques and the results.

While Dalton takes us on a solo voyage, Hoyt presents the work of others. He is a Whale and Dolphin Conservation research fellow who has spent most of his life studying, learning, and writing about these large animals. The photographers whose work is featured in *Strange Sea Creatures* are also divers who travel the oceans to work with researchers such as Hoyt and expeditions mounted by organizations such as National Geographic and David Attenborough's Blue Planet. Hoyt has written 24 books—and some 600 scientific papers—from academic monographs to books for children and young adults, including a couple similar to this one. The unseen locations are exotic—Russia's White Sea and Sea of Okhotsk, the waters of Komodo National Park in Indonesia, or Scotland's Loch Duich—and familiar, such as the gulfs of Maine or Mexico. Place is less important for Dalton, who very often brings his subjects to the studio, filled with complex equipment and gear designed for the sole purpose of catching them in motion. And catch them he did—and does—for, like Hoyt, he is still at it. Each author continues to open up through photography new fields of experience for armchair observers. In both books we see things that most of us cannot observe any other way. The authors share the hope that not all of us will stay in our armchairs but be inspired to follow their pioneering trails and become, wherever we are, ambitious students of the natural world around us.

BARRY COTTAM  
Cardigan, PE, Canada