

The Canadian Field-Naturalist

Book Reviews

Book Review Editor's Note: *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* is a peer-reviewed scientific journal publishing papers on ecology, behaviour, taxonomy, conservation, and other topics relevant to Canadian natural history. In line with this mandate, we review books with a Canadian connection, including those on any species (native or non-native) that inhabits Canada, as well as books covering topics of global relevance, including climate change, biodiversity, species extinction, habitat loss, evolution, and field research experiences.

Currency Codes: CAD Canadian Dollars, USD United States Dollars, EUR Euros, AUD Australian Dollars, GBP British Pounds.

BOTANY

Field Study: Meditations on a Year at the Herbarium

By Helen Humphreys. 2021. ECW Press. 232 pages, 32.95 CAD, Hardcover, 17.99 CAD, E-book.

Field Study is a very charming little book. Its small size and attractive cover image of a herbarium specimen evoke its theme, and the inclusion of herbarium sheet reproductions (in the form of high-quality scans), specimen labels, and plant illustrations maintains this theme throughout the book.

Humphreys is a poet and novelist, and *Field Study* chronicles her one-year study of the Fowler Herbarium collection held by the Department of Biology at Queen's University Biological Station (QUBS) in Elgin, Ontario.

Book sections are organized into the four seasons of the year, and the author's comments on the passage of time flow organically throughout the book. Chapters are predominantly labelled for the plant groups that Humphreys discusses (e.g., Ferns, Pines, Grasses) as she moves through the herbarium collection. Peppered with philosophical musings and reflections from the author, most of the writing comprises short biographies (ranging from a few sentences to a few pages) of collectors who contributed to the herbarium and information about the specimens they collected. Humphreys's deep appreciation and fondness for the Fowler Herbarium and its contents are palpable, and reading this book feels a bit like looking over



her shoulder as she explores the collection and the lives of the people who made it possible.

This is an easy, quick read with many full-page herbarium sheet reproductions and illustrations. Many of these herbarium sheets are sourced from the Fowler Herbarium, but several others are from the collections of Emily Dickinson and Henry David Thoreau. Superscript is used sparingly in the text to link to extra information—such as references and definitions—compiled in a Notes section at the back of the book. I appreciate that Humphreys comments on the settler-colonial history of plant collecting in several instances, highlighting the traditional Indigenous knowledge that is missing from the otherwise detailed historical botanical record stewarded by herbaria.

Whether you will enjoy this book is a question of personal interest. Although I enjoyed *Field Study*, I cannot exactly say that I would recommend it. Despite the inclusion of some plant facts and miscellany, the bulk of this book is dedicated to brief plant collector biographies that just do not appeal to me as much as other topics related to herbaria. If you are curious about the plant collectors of days gone by and wish to be steeped in a herbarium for a short while, you could do much worse than spending time with this attractive little book.

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