

pating in Nest Record Card programs and Project FeederWatch.

Chu concludes by calling attention to the many hazards facing bird populations, such as loss of habitat, increasing parasitism by cowbirds, deaths from striking windows, communication towers, pesticides, carbon dioxide emissions, and acid rain. Twenty-nine species

have declined by more than fifty percent in the last 40 years. Despite these losses, the arrival of songbirds every spring remains a cause for celebration.

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## BOTANY

### Wildflowers of the Rocky Mountains

By G. Scotter and H. Flygare. Whitecap Books, 351 Lynn Avenue, North Vancouver, British Columbia V7J 2C4 Canada. 255 pages. \$ 29.95 Paper.

### Plants of Alberta

By F. Rover and R. Dickinson. 2007. Lone Pine Publishing. 10145 – 81 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 1W9 Canada. 527 pages. \$ 29.95 Paper.

It is most interesting that these two books have been published within such a short space of time. They were of immediate interest to me as I visit family in Alberta and usually manage a trip or two to the Rockies or the prairies. While they cover very different areas they include many of the same species. Furthermore, the authors have taken significantly different approaches.

*Wildflowers of the Rocky Mountains* [Wildflowers] contains 350 species of selected plants in six sections by flower colour [white, yellow and cream, green, pink, red, orange, and brown, purple and blue.] Each page depicts typically two species, all with a description, a photograph and a range map. The authors say they have chosen the most common species (typically the pretty species) likely to be encountered during visits to the Rockies, plus a few rarities. The area covered is the Rocky Mountain zone from northern British Columbia to New Mexico. This is a complete revision and expansion of a 1986 guide, that covered 228 species. The authors state that over the years they have learned to use non-technical language. They have been successful in applying this talent and has produced a very readable book.

I have a few problems with *Wildflowers*. I have a different view on the choice of colours. For example, I consider Mountain Sorrel to be reddish-brown not pink as the authors contend. Similarly, I think of Flame-coloured Lousewort (*Pedicularis flammea*) as red, but the authors have placed this plant in the cream section (because the flowers have a cream base). To further add to my confusion this plant is called Oeder's Lousewort (*P. oederi*) but *P. flammea* is given as the synonym. (However a web search of *P. oederi* showed images of cream-only flowers, while an image search for *P. flammea* showed cream-based flowers with significant amounts of red on the tips. A search for synonyms of *P. oederi* did not include *P. flammea*.) The alternative names are not included in the index. Many of the English, and some of the scientific names are not the ones I am used to. As an example, this book's Four-part

Dwarf Gentian or Felwort is called Alpine Gentian in other texts.

The range maps are coloured in for the entire state or province regardless of how widespread the plant is. So Bear Grass is shown as occurring in Alberta, whereas it can only be found in the vicinity of Waterton Lakes National Park. This greatly reduces the usefulness of these maps.

I thought the approach used by *Wildflowers* – arranging the species by flower colour – was useful only for beginners. After a couple of years most people know the major families, like vetch, violet, saxifrage and so forth and I thought this is the way people progressed. Recently I was told that women prefer books organized by flower colour and I found my wife agreed.

The photographs are very good and will be useful in identifying blooms in the field. The descriptions in *Wildflowers* are written in prose, often in a poetic style that makes for pleasant reading. There is an excellent introduction on the eco-zones and a wonderfully clear glossary.

The second book is *Plants of Alberta* (*Plants*) which covers over 1500 native plants that can be found in Alberta. It is arranged by family and includes aquatic plants, grasses, ferns and trees (so not just the pretty flowers). Certainly I prefer the *Plants* method of arranging by families so I can reference all the orchids, violets, louseworts, etc. together. It too has a description, a photograph and a range map also shown two to a page. There is a short introduction and a decent glossary.

*Plants'* descriptions are cryptic and scientific. Compare "While other saxifrages may dress in flowers of white or yellow, Purple Mountain Saxifrage is garbed with flowers of the richest rose-purple to royal purple" (in *Wildflowers*) with the terse "Flowers: Purple (occasionally pinkish or white.)" (in *Plants*)

The photos in *Plants* average about twice the size of those in *Wildflowers* – a considerable benefit. This is achieved by having no margins, giving 20% extra space. Also the headers giving the plant names and family are 60% smaller [but less artistic!]. As the text is shorter the text size is bigger – great advantage for older eyes. The larger script comes at the loss of poetic text to terse notes. So despite the book's slightly smaller pager size (10%), by the creative use of space the publishers have created a more appealing looking book.

The range maps cover Alberta and show the area within the province where you can see the plant. This is useful because it shows over 35% of Alberta's species are confined to the southern border with British Columbia and the United States. As the maps are small (1 × 2 cm) they require some interpretation. I photographed a Striped Coralroot in Bow Valley Provincial Park, so I verified that the range map showed this plant at this location. It does, but it required careful examination and analysis due to the size. The other distributions are equally valid.

There is also a key arranged by leaf structure and flower colour. This uses thumbnail (¾") photos of the

families. So *Violas* appear in the white, yellow and purple sections. Is this enough to satisfy the ladies?

Despite my clear preference for *Plants* as a book, I would say that both of these books are good guides. The photographs are excellent and the text, while very different in style, gives solid information. Your choice should be dictated by your intentions or location. Alternatively, and this I suggest is the best idea, you could buy both as both, are good value for money.

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## MISCELLANEOUS

### Pilgrimage to Vallombrosa: From Vermont to Italy in the Footsteps of George Perkins Marsh

By John Elder. 2006. University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA. xv + 282 pages. U.S. \$29.95 Cloth.

This book is a story of pilgrimage, of memory, of hope. It's a beautiful book, a book of life, of family, of nature and culture. John Elder, a professor of English at Vermont's Middlebury College, invites the reader on a pilgrimage. It is a story of connections; from the second and third growth sugar bush hills of Vermont to the centuries-old, culturally prestigious forests of Vallombrosa in the Tuscany hills; from the sugar bush to the olive grove; from Robert Frost to Dante.

Vermont-born George Perkins Marsh was Abraham Lincoln's diplomat to the new Kingdom of Italy from 1861 until his death in 1882. Considered to be America's first environmentalist, Marsh was the author of the celebrated *Man and Nature* (1864). Inspired by his study of the rise and fall of Mediterranean cultures and his extensive experience of the region, Marsh's manifesto focused on environmental decline as central to the collapse of these once powerful cultures. Marsh was the first to describe and document the drastic, long-term impact of deforestation on civilization. His *Man and Nature* stirred the American imagination as America itself experienced the wave of deforestation flowing from east to west across the American landscape.

A sabbatical year permitted Elder and his wife to set out on a pilgrimage across France and Italy. Elder's purpose was to pursue the footsteps of Marsh who died in Vallombrosa in 1882. A pilgrimage usually has a set route, but novelty and surprise are to be expected. A pilgrimage on foot always becomes a pilgrimage of the heart and of the mind. Elder skillfully invites the reader on a pilgrimage of ideas, one that examines our place in nature.

Elder divides his pilgrimage into three landscapes, each connected to Marsh's vision of conservation. First is the journey to and within Tuscany, the crucible of

Marsh's thinking in the city of Florence, the surrounding hill towns and the celebrated forests of Vallombrosa. Second, is the literary landscape where Elder situates Marsh within the lineage of William Wordsworth, Matsuo Bashō and Robert Frost. The final section returns to Vermont, to Marsh's native Woodstock, the sugar bush of the Elder family, and to the Vermont-wide conservation initiatives.

Those who set out on a pilgrimage usually have a destination in mind. But that is often the only sure thing about a pilgrimage. It's what happens in between that counts and that often surprises. Nothing is hard and fast for Elder, nothing black-or-white. He writes skillfully of what he terms the "middle landscape," that ecotone where wilderness and civilization meet. It is upon that middle ground that Elder chooses to focus, weaving the theme of "stewardship" throughout his work.

The term "stewardship" has fallen on hard times in certain intellectual circles. Its anthropocentric connotations are too aristocratic, too old-fashioned for some. Not so for Elder, who calls for a mutuality of human history and natural history. He calls for preservation of not only biodiversity but also human values and community, a place where technology and religious faith both have their own special role to play. For Elder, the environmental crisis is ultimately a crisis of culture, a crisis of the human soul, a crisis of the human heart. Stewardship, brought into proper dialogue with contemporary ecological, feminist, religious and social justice thought, can engender the cultural and moral resources necessary to address the environmental needs of our time.

Elder's attempt to re-frame the discussion is welcome. Too often has environmental conversation fractured into dualistic dichotomies, into opposing camps of nature and culture. We need both voices to forge a social ecology, where ecosystems are not considered in the absence of culture and vice-versa. It's that middle ground that provides the vital connection between