

## MISCELLANEOUS

**A Sound Like Water Dripping**

By Soren Bondrup-Nielsen. 2009. Gaspereau Press, 47 Church Avenue, Kentville, Nova Scotia B4N 2M7 Canada. 236 pages, illus. 26.95 CAD, Paper.

*A Sound Like Water Dripping*, by Acadia University biologist Soren Bondrup-Nielsen, is an engaging account of the author's graduate research on the boreal owl in Canada in the 1970s, when very little was known about the species. Bondrup-Nielsen went on to discover and study the first boreal owl nest in Ontario.

The book's intriguing title is based on a description of the owl's song in a Montagnais legend – the only reference to boreal owl vocalisations the author could find at the time. Armed with that description, a smattering of background information, a recording of the closely related European Tengmalm's Owl song, plus the necessary equipment and enthusiasm for conducting research in the north in winter, the young Bondrup-Nielsen stepped onto the train bound for northern Ontario.

The text of the book is based on the author's meticulous and detailed field notes, which he revisited to write the book. "I closed off from the world around me," he writes, "and withdrew into my mind to relive the past through matured reflection." The result is an intimate, honest, delightful, and often humorous account of a biology graduate student's struggles and successes, disappointments and thrills, follies and triumphs, all told in fine-grained detail accompanied by charming photographs.

Some of the more memorable passages revolve around incidents in the north or discoveries related to research. One of the author's tasks, for example, was to trap and dissect samples of the small rodents eaten by boreal owls. He writes about the stories he is able to read from the necropsies of females through close attention to the uterus – particularly its size, form, scars, follicles containing eggs, and embryos. He adds that he was always saddened to discover females that had been

lactating, because it meant a nest of orphaned young.

More humorous is his story of bumping into a moose one overcast night as he returned home from monitoring owl nests. He writes of walking along lost in contemplation of the warm bed awaiting him back in his cabin, when he suddenly hit "a large, warm, furry wall." The wall, which turned out to be a moose, took off immediately and crashed away through the bush, leaving Bondrup-Nielsen standing alone, baffled, and wondering who had been more shocked by the encounter. He was also puzzled at how he managed to sneak up on a moose undetected.

One of the more salient research discovery stories did not unfold in the field, but rather inadvertently in the walk-in bird cage on the roof of the University of Toronto Zoology building, where the author kept a captive boreal owl named Ruffles. On a weekend when he planned to be away, Bondrup-Nielsen asked a fellow graduate student to feed the owl its usual daily thawed white laboratory mouse. One day the student forgot to thaw the mouse and gave Ruffles a frozen one instead. The owl's subsequent behaviour, as reported by the student who went to check on the bird later, was curious; Ruffles was sitting on the mouse. Bondrup-Nielsen put two and two together and concluded that the owl was thawing its prey, a fact he later confirmed through experiments.

Bondrup-Nielsen is a natural storyteller, and he manages to avoid heavy jargon, which makes *A Sound Like Water Dripping* particularly easy to read. This well-written, engaging, and beautifully illustrated book would make a wonderful addition to the library of any naturalist or birder interested in a good story.

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**The Beachcomber's Guide to Seashore Life in the Pacific Northwest – Revised edition**

By J. Duane Sept. 2009. Harbour Publishing, P.O. Box 219, Madeira Park, British Columbia V0N 2H0 Canada 224 pages., 26.95 CAD Paper.

As a frequent comber of the beaches of the Pacific Northwest coast, I was delighted to own this guide. It covers the area of British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon.

It begins with a brief explanation of tides and the various intertidal habitats, with a warning of dangers that accompany searching in these areas. The bulk of the book covers a description and excellent photos of some 270 commonly found specimens. These are arranged according to phylum currently in use; genus and species are given in Latin as well as the common

name. There is a description of each species, along with the size, habitat and range. Also included, are other pertinent facts of natural history interest.

I found this guide very informative, clearly written and beautifully illustrated. It certainly will be a stimulus for any reader to further interest in seashore life, both animal and plant.

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