

The Last Island: A Naturalist's Sojourn on Triangle Island

By Alison Watt. 2002. Harbour Publishing, Madeira Park, British Columbia. 192 pages. \$34.95.

Most of this book (pages 15-157) consists of a chronicle of a single field season (late April to 1 September 1980) spent by the author as a field assistant to the late Anne Vallée on the western-most of the Scott Islands off the northwestern tip of Vancouver Island. Triangle Island is famous as the site of an exceptionally unsuccessful lighthouse (too often shrouded in fog) and for its colonies of seabirds. One of these seabird species, the Tufted Puffin, was the subject of Vallée's study. Watt's chronicle is written in diary form and is partly a diary, but is also embellished with details of various aspects of the flora and fauna of the island gleaned from the literature and from conversations with other biologists, as well as historical events and native beliefs along British Columbia's west coast, personal reminiscences, dreams and random thoughts by the author. An introduction (pages 9-13) and "part two" (pages 158-174) chronicle another brief sojourn in August 1996. Watt's text is supplemented with several illustrations of plants, sea life and birds, mostly in colour, with a series of "notes" (pages 179-183) expanding on various biological, geographical and historical details and by a "selected bibliography," guiding the interested reader to sources for more detail on the island, the biology and natural history of some of the species mentioned, the culture of the tribes who frequented the area before Europeans arrived and other topics mentioned in the text.

The book presents a wide sweep of the fauna, flora and geology of Triangle Island and its offshore waters, but it does not offer complete coverage of its natural history. Rather, it presents a sample of the author's observations, sometimes in the context of other local or world-wide knowledge. Apart from a few brief comments and some of the drawings, it offers little in the way of "field guide" elements, as claimed on the dust jacket, but is best described by that dust jacket's characterization as "an intimate memoir." Since I spent a month on the island, I found much of interest in its numerous natural history snippets. For those who haven't been there, its appeal will also lie primarily in

these snippets. The author's skill at presenting the joys and tensions of spending a prolonged field session in close quarters with one other person on an isolated island rich in natural history under highly variable, often rapidly changing weather conditions also provides insight into the sociology of scientific field research.

Watt's research appears to be reasonably thorough and I found few outright errors in the book. Birds are not actually born (pages 74 and 163) – they are hatched. Two genera are not italicized (*Laminaria* on page 96 and *Noctiluca* on page 101), and a few minor grammatical errors escaped editing. As most countries now use metric measurements, the English dimensions of the island (pages 93 and 95) should have been translated into metric for the sake of younger Canadian and other non-U.S. readers. As suggested by its title, the selected bibliography is far from complete, but lists enough references on the island's natural history to guide the reader to more detail. Before reading the book, I checked the index for Green-winged Teal to see whether or not the author had seen some feeding behaviour that interested me during my stay there. This species was not included in the index, but is mentioned briefly on page 144. Curious as to whether or not this was a singular omission, I checked the index for six other species mentioned in the same paragraph (pages 144-145) and found none listed, suggesting that the index is as selective as the bibliography.

In short, Alison Watt's words, paintings and drawings provide colourful examples of several floral and faunal elements of Triangle Island, as well as interactions among some of these elements, information on how some of the knowledge gleaned there fits into the "bigger picture," and the effects that living in near isolation have on the thoughts of field researchers. It provides an interesting introduction to the island's rich natural history, but is not a comprehensive treatise on it.

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Nature by Design

By Eric Higgs. 2003. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England. 0-262-58226-0. 341 pages. Cloth U.S. \$68; paper U.S. \$27.95.

Nature by Design is a noteworthy exploration of the philosophy of restoration ecology. Beginning with a compelling look at the issues and complexities surrounding the management of Jasper National Park, Eric Higgs walks the reader along a path that explains what ecological restoration is, how and why it is practiced, and the many philosophical issues that weave

through the concept(s) of restoration. The core of this book centers on the changing meanings of restoration and nature while the act of restoration itself, becomes increasingly technological.

Written for both the novice and experienced in the field of restoration ecology, Higgs' book is imaginatively organized. In the first chapter, Higgs does a first-rate job of highlighting the philosophical problems of restoration, with a poignant example comparing Jasper National Park and Disney World's themed Hotel,