

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

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The Race to Save the Lord Bird by Phillip Hoose. Maps by Jeffrey L. Ward. [2004]. 196 pages. 9 x 11 inches. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York. \$30.00 Can. (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Charlesworth.*

This is the story of a huge, prehistoric-looking woodpecker, whose loud calls and arrow-like flight once penetrated the dark, ancient swamps of the southeastern United States. The bird was the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*). First described in 1731, the range of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker quickly declined as European settlers began clearing the forest for crops, and illegal shooting of birds for personal and museum collections was rampant. As old-growth forests were sold and logged in the early 1900s throughout the southeastern United States this magnificent woodpecker was forced into one last tiny fragment of habitat – the Singer Tract in Louisiana. In 1944, the last Ivory-billed Woodpecker in North America was seen in the Singer Tract. The species was rediscovered in eastern Cuba in 1986, but was last seen there in 1987. After the publication of this book, an Ivory-billed Woodpecker was discovered in the “Big Woods” region of Arkansas in February 2004 and a species long thought to be extinct on the continent came back into the limelight.

The author tells the tale from the very first documented sighting of the “Lord God Bird” to its supposed final days as a part of the North American avi-fauna. Mr. Hoose does a brilliant job of creating an emotional bond between the reader and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker through detailed descriptions and a historic collection of rare photographs of the bird, its habitats, and the people who studied and worked so hard to save the population. The documentation of the desperate race by scientists and conservationists, who knew the Ivory-billed Woodpecker was nearing extinction, is a powerful model for future conservation efforts. The author’s descriptive writing style makes reader feel as though they are amongst the massive

cypress trees and the clouds of hungry mosquitoes in a southeastern swamp watching the majestic birds.

Phillip Hoose not only documents the near demise of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, but also explains in detail other conservation battles of the 20th Century, such as the fight to stop the plume trade and the end of widespread collecting of birds. In addition, the book describes many major advances made in the 20th Century, in ornithology and science in general, such as the invention of bird song recording devices. This book provides the reader with a wealth of information on what is now perhaps the rarest bird in the world. Recommended.

Astonishing Animals: Extraordinary Creatures and the Fantastic Worlds they Inhabit by Tim Flannery and Peter Schouten. [2004]. 206 pages. 9.5 x 11 inches. \$41.95 Can.(hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Australians Flannery and Schouten collaborated to produce a wonderful book that is much more than just a picture book. Zoologist Flannery explores with humour how some of the world’s most fascinating animals have adapted to the stresses of life. Schouten’s colourful and realistic paintings are reproduced full or double page with the largest about 46 cm x 27 cm. A paragraph or two of Flannery’s text follows each painting. The text page is otherwise blank – that’s a lot of white space, but I can see what the publishers intended: the reader is much more likely to read two nicely spaced paragraphs than attempt a whole page of text, especially these days of short attention spans.

Six themes are explored: vertical terrain, motion specialists, food and feeding, shape shifting, habitat specialization, and the vertical ocean. The vertical terrain presents 15 of the world’s most flamboyant birds: birds of paradise, hummingbirds, a nightjar, contingas, a quetzal, a tragopan, and two pheasants. In the second chapter Flannery explains how specialized motion allows species to “invade ecological niches unavailable to their competitors and, on occasion, give rise to entirely new dynasties of organisms.” While the text is simply written, the concepts presented are basic to modern biology and are clearly explained and dramatically illustrated making *Astonishing Animals...* a book that appeals to

a wide audience.

Not only are the animals in this book astonishing, some of them are wonderfully creepy. I don't want to ruin the reader's fun so I'll mention only one example, a bat (*Cheiromeles parvidens*) from Sulawesi. Naked except for stiff hairs inside a pouch on its throat and along the outer edge of the big toe, this bat has long pointed swift-like wings. It also has side pouches to store these wings while it scurries over the forest floor. The toe fringe might serve as a comb since the bat is often crawling with large earwigs; an external parasite found nowhere else in the world. Here's the hideous part: if these earwigs were scaled to the average-sized person, it would be like having kitten-sized parasites roaming over your body!

Astonishing Animals... always whets our appetite for more. I don't know anyone, aside from the terminally squeamish, who could resist the glimpses this book gives into the world of amazing creatures. Highly recommended.

A Birder's Guide to Coastal Washington by Bob Morse. [2001]. 5.5 x 8.5 inches. \$20.00 US. (softcover, coil binding). R. W. Morse Co., Olympia, WA. *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Bob Morse thinks Ocean Shores is the best single birding site in Washington State. Almost 300 species have been seen "...on any given day ... seeing a hundred species of birds is an attainable goal". Such wonderful avian diversity is not surprising to anyone who has birded the outer Olympic coast or Gray's Harbor. Not only are there many kinds of birds, but many of the species that emblemize the Northwest are easily found there. Some include Black-footed Albatross, Buller's Shearwater, Eurasian Wigeon, Marbled Murrelet, Tufted Puffin, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Spotted Owl, Band-tailed Pigeon, Townsend's Warbler, and Varied Thrush. Quite simply, coastal Washington is great for birds. Morse's book will guide birders to 160 of the best birding sites from Ilwaco in the south to Neah Bay in the north. Note, however, that this does not cover Puget Sound or the Olympic coast east of Sekiu.

The book has several attractive features. It is closely modeled upon the current crop of the American Birding Association's bird-finding guides that include the same size, font, and coil binding but

in some ways *A Birder's Guide to Coastal Washington* surpasses them. The book contains a multitude of colour photographs of both sites and species. About 80 northwest specialty birds get a photo each. The maps are large and accurate. The text is well written and occasionally includes items on local natural history, weather, and mammals. Of particular value are Morse's recommendations of local restaurants and accommodations. Appendices include a checklist, notes on specialty species, contact information, for coastal birding organizations, and lists of hotels and chambers of commerce. The introduction briefly covers climate, habitats, vegetation, and distances between key locations. A useful feature is a website address where updates and corrections to the guide can be found. Recommended.