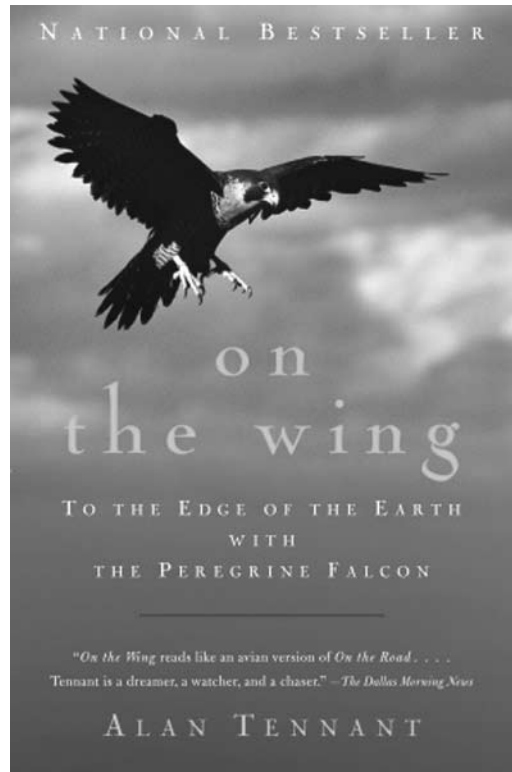


PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

On the Wing: To the Edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon by Alan Tennant. 2004. 304 pages. 14 x 20.5 cms. 22 colour photos. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY. \$21.00 Can. *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

On the Wing: ... is the true story of Alan Tennant and his pilot friend George Voss. In a small plane they tracked a *tundrius* Peregrine Falcon north with the spring toward its Arctic breeding ground after Alan had attached a radio transmitter to it on South Padre Island, Texas. The second half of the book concerns their attempts to follow the signals from three immature *tundrius* falcons from Texas across autumnal Mexico toward Belize. Alan, a part time English instructor, author and occasional nature tour guide, and Voss, an old pilot near the end of his flying



career, are both captivated not by science so much as by the falcons' "all-encompassing quest for home" (p. 280). Partially because both men improvise as they go and partially because both are impulsive and stubborn, adventure and danger follow their falcon pursuits. There are hairy-scary moments like when their Skyhawk 469 hurtles earthwards gripped by a monstrous downdraft. There are tense moments when an hysterical Mexican marijuana farmer points a machine pistol at them deciding whether to shoot or not. And there's the heart break of the on-again off-again romance between Alan and Jennifer who can take only so many days wondering where her boyfriend will disappear to next. These are the parts of the plot that make the book an exciting read. However, *On the Wing*: ... is also full of information about Peregrine Falcons and the ecosystems they inhabit, their DDT contaminated decline, and recovery amid the dangers the birds still face.

For readers who like drama and humour with their nature, *On the Wing: To the Edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon* is recommended.

Squirrels: The Animal Answer Guide by Richard W. Thorington Jr. and Katie Ferrell. 2006. 183 pages. 18 x 25 cm. 100+ colour and black-and-white photographs. Index. 13 page bibliography. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. www.press.jhu.edu \$35.00 Can. (soft cover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle*.

Often the only wild mammals we see in our outings are squirrels, or sometimes ground squirrels or marmots, and too often we take them all for granted. If we pause to think about them we usually come up with lots of questions but very few answers, like why are Red Squirrels so abundant in forests? What functions do they serve in the ecosystem? How many young do they have? Do they breed once a year? Why do we so rarely see baby squirrels? Now an attractive volume from one of the world's squirrel experts, and his former research assistant, is available to begin to answer such questions. And they teach us in such an enthusiastic, accurate, yet often witty and entertaining way.

Twelve chapters organize questions into categories such as form and function, genetics,



behaviour, ecology, reproduction and development, foods and feeding, and squirrels and humans. Three of my favourite chapters are squirrel problems (from a human point of view), human problems (from a squirrel's point of view) and "squirrelology" which is an introduction for the budding squirrel scientist. An appendix lists the world's squirrels and gives each species' general distribution.

Written so that an intelligent junior high school student could comprehend it, *Squirrels*: ... is an invaluable edition to the naturalist's library. Highly recommended.

An Enchantment of Birds: Memories from a Birder's Life by Richard Cannings. 2007. 211 pages. 14 x 20 cm. 30 black-and-white sketches. Greystone Books, 2323 Quebec Street, Suite 201, Vancouver, BC, V5T 4S7. \$29.95 Can. (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle*.

A regular on the noon show on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio, Dick Cannings

is probably the province's most widely known ornithologist. This small, attractive and inexpensive hardcover contains Dick's accounts of his most interesting experiences he has had with 30 bird species. The species include a few Okanagan specialties (Pygmy Nuthatch, White-headed Woodpecker, Flammulated Owl, and Gray Flycatcher) that the knowledgeable birder often associates with Dick's home, the south Okanagan valley, some widely distributed western species (American Dipper, Western Meadowlark, Clark's Nutcracker, and Calliope Hummingbird); a few that occur across Canada (Evening Grosbeak, Bohemian Waxwing, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Northern Flicker, and American Coot) as well as birds from Pacific and Atlantic coasts (Tufted Puffin and Northern Gannet).

For example, the "chapter" in entertaining about the Horned Lark centres around Dick's M.Sc. studies of Horned Lark breeding behavior in Newfoundland. "The Rock" is infamous for its occasionally

unwelcoming weather. Dick pursued larks through fog, sleet, rain and above all constant wind. The birds were so hard to mist net that he resorted to hand-netting incubating adults at their nests in the middle of the night! His study was interrupted by a storm with winds gusting to 130 kph. Just re-filling the outside canister of his oil stove which warmed his little hut became a battle with the elements. Although the larks lost nestlings to the storm, many of them re-nested and Dick was able to follow their breeding cycle into the autumn.

With several books now published, Dick has developed an admirably clear yet expressive style. The *Enchantment of Birds: ...* will be enjoyed by biologists, birders, and anyone with any interest in nature. Highly recommended.

