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Review of: Salamanders of the United States and Canada

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Beringia. In Pleistocene times much of the Yukon, Alaska, and Eastern Siberia was a great ice-free island refuge for the northern biota. This volume, which was 20 years in gestation, gives a detailed if partial picture of the present-day legacy of the Beringian arthropod fauna, together with its other boreal and southern elements. It is a mine of data for the systematist, ecologist, and biogeographer, and it may well be an important base line for the future evaluation of consequences of global warming. One can only hope that those concerned with the Alaskan and Siberian sectors of Beringia will in due course emulate the splendid example set by the Canadians. But there is room for doubt. Many of the contributors to this volume stress that there is much yet to be done on the Yukon fauna. Insects of the Yukon may nevertheless be a testament to the end of an era. As the tsunami of molecular biology engulfs “old-fashioned” biology, and museums go untended or extinct, the prospects for a full evaluation of the Yukon fauna, of all Beringia, and thus the sense of our northern heritage, recede alarmingly.

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SALAMANDERS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA.
This book is a compilation of the current knowledge on the natural history, geographic distribution, and ecology for 127 species of North American salamanders. Its purpose is to serve as a reference for researchers, science teachers, naturalists, and others interested in the herpetofauna of North America. To this end, the work exceeds expectations. The volume includes citations to more than 2100 research papers, as well as color plates of adult, juvenile and larval forms.

An introductory discussion of species concepts is followed by justification for why certain named species have not been included in this survey. The author uses a biological species concept, and species recognized on other grounds (such as genetic differentiation) are mentioned in the text under their synonymized name. Next is an introductory chapter on salamander biodiversity, life history, and natural history, followed by a brief description of salamander morphology and two dichotomous keys: one for adults, and one for larval forms.

Most of the book is devoted to individual species entries, which are found in chapters sorted by family. For each family, there is a general description of its major characteristics, its evolutionary history and age, and any taxonomic and systematic treatments. Species accounts are divided into sections on identification, systematics and geographic variation, distribution and adult habitat, breeding and courtship, reproductive strategy, aquatic ecology, terrestrial ecology, predators and defense, community ecology, and conservation biology. Each section is a comprehensive treatment of the known literature, and is generously sprinkled with citations, so one may easily find the pertinent primary literature for the taxon. A range map for each species is included, as are other interesting photographs of egg masses, typical habitats, and spermatophores. When more than one color morph exists (e.g., striped and unstriped phases of Plethodon cinereus), color plates are often found for both. Although some species entries are quite short, others span 12 or more pages, reflecting the wealth of knowledge available for those particular taxa. A quick glance at this volume thus allows one to determine where further research is needed.

Generally, this work will serve as a useful research tool for biologists who are interested in North American salamanders, and is a must for beginning herpetologists.
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A PASSION FOR BIRDS: AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY AFTER AUDUBON.
The author describes the shifting social relations between various interest groups in the American ornithological community during the era between the Civil War and World War II. At the start, the major groups were collectors, natural history suppliers, and a very few ornithologists (i.e., persons who add to the knowledge of birds through publications). Toward the end of the era collectors and suppliers had disappeared, ornithologists had become more numerous, and legions of bird enthusiasts (i.e., birders, bird watchers, bird lovers, listers) and conservationists had joined the community. Predictably, rivalries between these factions were common and sometimes bitter.

People interested in the development of ornithology in North America will enjoy reading this well-documented book. I wish to point out some perceived weaknesses, however. The title notwithstanding, the book gives only cursory treatment to bird enthusiasts, whose huge and ever-increasing numbers continue to surprise. The book suffers from provincialism. Virtually no mention is made of the ornithological events that took place west of the Appalachians, despite century-long histories of the Cooper and Wilson ornithological societies. The book is heavily slanted toward a history of the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU), which formed in the east, and for decades was primarily an eastern