

# Book Reviews

• Readers' comments on reviews should be addressed to the Editor.

## Environmental Biology

OUR PRECARIOUS HABITAT, by Melvin A. Benarde. Rev. ed., 1973. W. W. Norton & Co., New York. 462 p. \$3.95 softback, \$7.95 hardback.

The title of this book could have been "Our Habitat"; however, Benarde inserted "Precarious" to describe the potentially hazardous condition of our environment—a condition we still have time to repair. The author presents a wealth of information for the reader who wishes to know how science and technology affect his daily life—information that will enable him to evaluate environmental issues objectively in their political context in the United States and the world. The author expresses the hope that a well-informed citizenry will be able to cope with the increasing number of actual and potential environmental health problems. As an aid to accomplishing this, Benarde uses an integrated approach to understanding man's effect on his environment. The interrelated topics include the ecology of health and disease; chemicals in our foods; bacterial food poisoning; pesticides; waste-disposal systems; air, water, and noise pollution; radiation; population; and the politics of pollution.

The author has extensively revised the first edition (1970) to take into account the many changes in environmental theory, policy, and practice. With the addition of chapter 15, "Population and Progress," he presents a balanced, realistic study of this controversial subject. The former chapter 15, "Biological and Chemical Welfare," has been deleted.

The book is directed to the college student in environmental and health courses. It is also meant for the general reader who wishes to help solve today's problems on the basis of knowledge and understanding, rather than on emotional fervor founded on superstition, ignorance, and prejudice. The chapters on "Chemicals in Our Foods" and "Bacterial Food Poisoning" require a strong background in chemistry.

The book is clearly printed, has excellent illustrations, graphs, and tables, and contains ample references and suggested readings. Benarde's talent for witty and informative writing gives quality and clarity to this book, which is a reliable scientific exposition.

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AUTUMN OF THE EAGLE, by George Laycock. 1973. Charles Schibner's Sons, New York. 240 p. \$6.95 (hardback).

Perhaps it can be said that every naturalist feels he has in him at least one good book. Were George Laycock never to write another, *Autumn of the Eagle* surely satisfies the expectation. Begin with a handsome species, add the pristine setting of giant birds and tall trees in possibly the world's richest deciduous forest, include the nostalgia of the Lake Erie that once was and the probings of pioneering naturalists, and one has the beginnings of a story. Then unravel, chronologically, crises in the form of habitat destruction, eggshell-thinning caused by DDT, shotgun pellets fired from airplanes, predator-bait carcasses laced with poisons, and an account of the apparent remorseless workings of such things. Given that the species in question is the bald eagle—the national emblem—and that Laycock has a clear talent for story-telling, a book with these ingredients could hardly fail to interest anyone with an ounce of identity with nature.

The author has clearly done his homework. On 4 July 1776 John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin were given the task of choosing an official seal for the new Republic. Congress could not decide between their recommendations of the Biblical scene and a seal based on Greek mythology. The matter was tabled for four years. Then an artist, William Barton, was commissioned to design a seal; but his creation, bearing a heraldic eagle, did not satisfy Congress. Finally, a congressional secretary, Charles Thompson, aided by Barton, drew an emblem with a bald eagle holding an unlikely olive branch in one foot and a bundle of arrows in the other. Congress accepted this design within a week.

It was 189 years later, on 1 May 1971, in Jackson Canyon near Casper, Wyo., that two high-school boys opened the latest chapter in the bald eagle's losing battle with man. The boys located the first of 48 dead eagles, including some golden eagles, poisoned with thallium sulfate, a nonselective toxicant used by ranchers to kill coyotes. Public concern spurred a federal investigation, which resulted in a second discovery: a wealthy Wyoming rancher had hired aerial hunters of eagles, and nearly 800 birds, including many golden eagles, had been shot in 1970–71.

In the 189 years separating these events, the bald eagle population in the

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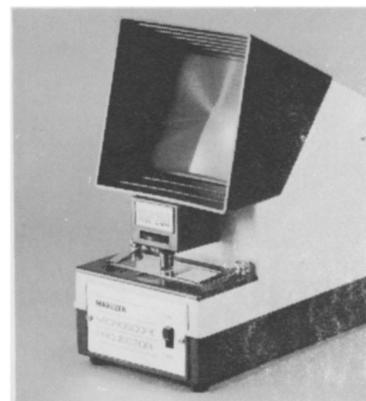
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