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MAMMALS

A Field Guide to Mammals of North America (Fourth Edition). By Fiona A. Reid. 2006. Houghton Mifflin Company. (ISBN 0395935962). 579 pp. Paperback. \$20.00.

Anyone who has picked up a Peterson Field Guide knows the value of these resources to the teacher, student, researcher, or scientist. This edition in the series is no exception. Even the physical design of the book lends itself to work in the field—from the ruler on the inside back cover to the relatively compact size that can fit into any backpack pocket.

The introduction notes that “the primary purpose of this book is to enable the reader to identify mammals seen in the wild.” The guide does this through various formats. Initially, the book opens with 66 plates of gorgeous illustrations done by the author and generally organized by groups of related species. The illustrations are accompanied by the common and scientific names of the animals, as well as short physical descriptions and range areas. Some plates also include tracks illustrations to help in the identification of the mammals.

Following these color plates are 14 skull plates that feature clear photographs of many of the mammals featured in the previous color plates. They are arranged from smallest to largest and then grouped taxonomically. Approximate skull lengths are provided, as well as dental formulas to further aid in accurate identification.

Subsequent to these sections is the real meat of the guide—the species accounts. Ideally, you would use the plates to give a quick identifica-

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tion in the field and then head to the species accounts to learn more about the mammal you are researching. The accounts give the following information: measurements, descriptions, similar species, sounds, habits, habitat, range, and status. In most cases, there are easy-to-read range maps right in the text to accompany the species. Many of them have photographs as well. Where applicable in the text, there is a reference to the plate number and skull plate number for the featured species. The text provides some great taxonomic information as well—the mammals are grouped by order with references to specific families in that order. This is in addition to the common and scientific names for each organism listed.

Starting out as a field zoologist and now as a biology teacher, I have turned time and again to the Peterson bird, insect, and plant guides for identification purposes. My students have used them numerous times for projects I have assigned in class. No matter the grade level of the student, they find the guides to be easy-to-use and informative. I am anxious for spring to arrive here in New York so I can get them out there in the woods again with this newest installment in the series. Fiona Reid has done a splendid job of updating the guide for mammals for the next generation of science students and scientists who will be adding this one to their packing lists.



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SPEAKING ABOUT SCIENCE

Speaking about Science: A Manual for Creating Clear Presentations. By Scott Morgan and Barrett Whitener. 2006. Cambridge University Press. (ISBN 0521683459). 126 pp. Paperback. \$22.99.

This book is designed to help sci-

entists become better seminar speakers. The majority of the book focuses on improving scientific presentations with chapters such as selecting slides, titling the talk, and fielding questions. Three additional chapters focus on scientific posters, job interviews, and media interviews. The book is authored by two professional public speakers and the intended audience is science graduate students, university professors, and government or industry scientists.

The authors' main premise is that eloquent speaking is a learned skill (as opposed to natural talent) and they present tips for all scientists to improve their ability to present scientific information. The authors have a clear sense of what makes a good presentation and the bulk of the book is a collection of the authors' do's and don'ts of presenting. Many points are useful such as choosing the main take home message of the talk first, only presenting data that relates to the take home message, how to highlight and describe the significance of each data slide, and how to silence the speaker's inner critic during presentations. The emphasis on using a teaching tone versus a lecturing tone for presentations is especially helpful. The authors state, “When she incorporates a teaching tone, an audience recognizes that the objective is to assist them, and they reciprocate that regard ... A good speaker is a good teacher.” Other tips seem silly, such as lower back exercises to improve vocal tone and speaking with a plastic straw clenched between the teeth to improve diction. The book is an easy read with numerous examples to illustrate the main points and bulleted conclusion lists to summarize each chapter.

The many rules given by the authors to improve presentations could be paralyzing to novice speakers. For example, they present a “two minutes a slide” rule, the need to verbally address all aspects of each slide, the need to orally introduce each data slide before showing it, and the desire to limit or remove all images from the introduction. Realizing they have inundated the reader with many specific tips, the authors conclude, “It is not a set of rules or a list of terms