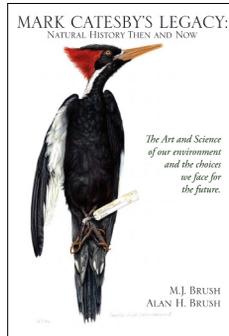


Mark Catesby's Legacy: Natural History Then and Now

By M.J. Brush and Alan H. Brush. 2018. The Catesby Commemorative Trust. 191 pages and 32 original watercolour plates, 28.95 USD, Paper.

Catesby's "watercolors ... were his legacy; [they] provided a perspective on nature, history and the environment, ... and an amazing tale of perseverance, exploration and art" (p. 6). They became "the benchmark for the early stage of the age of exploration and discovery in eastern North America" (p. 6). Alan and M.J. Brush have chosen the perfect time to answer for the reader the question of how much Catesby's world has changed in the centuries since his wonderful depiction of it.



Mark Catesby was born in Castle Hedingham, Essex, 24 March 1683, during the coldest winter in living memory. Mark's first transatlantic voyage to Virginia was as a chaperone for his eldest sister Elizabeth and her two children, sailing to Virginia to rejoin her husband, Dr. William Cocke, where they arrived 23 April 1712. Mark's first principal host was William Byrd II on his James River estate. Catesby travelled widely, visited Jamaica in 1714, then Bermuda, and was mentioned in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* in 1715. He regularly sent specimens to interested people in England, then returned to England by mid-October 1719. While in England during 1721, Catesby gained support of sponsors within the Royal Society, enabling him to sail to Charles Town, South Carolina, where he arrived 3 May 1722. He collected birds and plants until he reached the Bahamas early in 1725. He returned to England in 1726. Alan and M.J. Brush were stimulated by the Catesby Commemorative Trust which in November 2012 held a symposium to mark the 300th anniversary of Catesby's first voyage in three centres: Washington, DC, Richmond, Virginia, and Charleston, South Carolina. The symposium resulted in *The Curious Mister Catesby* (Neston and Elliott 2015).

From their home in Connecticut, Alan and M.J. Brush sailed their 330 Cape Dory cutter along the Atlantic coastline, often following the Intercoastal Waterway constructed in 1919 along the North Carolina and Georgia coasts. They then explored shallower waters

between the islands of the Bahamas. "The deck of a small sailboat offers an unprecedented view" (p. 15). One of their reported challenges was to explore the ways plants and animals made their living over the 300 years since Catesby's time, in light of the continually shifting, changing, and often hostile world. With Alan's life-long learning in biology, particularly ornithology, and M.J.'s artistic skills, we have the perfect combination throughout this book, chapter by chapter.

Most readers should find Alan's "brief history" of ornithology informative, but especially the page on the contributions of Linnaeus, who gave each bird and plant a genus and unique species name, which quickly became the world standard. Variations and refinements were contributed by two French scientists, Brisson and Reaumur, followed by the German Blumenbach, and then finally Charles Darwin specified natural selection working on natural variation. Next, Alan details the stories of three bird species declared extinct since Catesby's time, including Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), which was seen in aggregations of more than two million birds by Alexander Wilson in 1806, until the final aviary captive died in 1914 after 29 years in the Cincinnati Zoo. Ivory-billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) and Bachman's Warbler (*Vermivora bachmanii*) were last seen in 1943 and 1958, respectively.

M.J. provides gorgeous paintings of the plants, the Southern Orange, Southern Magnolia, Franklinia, Catalpa, Carolina Jessamine, Longleaf Pine, Wild Olive, Mountain Laurel, Sheep Laurel, Bog Laurel, Tulip Tree, Empress Tree, Brazilian Pepper-Tree, Morrows' Honeysuckle, Smooth Cordgrass, and fish, such as the Gray Triggerfish, Silk Snapper, Black Sea Bass, Graysby, and Yellow-fin Tuna, as well as Gray Sea Turtle and Caribbean Spiny Lobster.

Alan and M.J. point out the dynamic equilibrium of a salt marsh, with its grasses, snails, and shells, and the role they play for the White Ibis, Scarlet Ibis, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Fish Crow, American Oystercatcher, crabs, scallops, and oysters. M.J.'s most recent exciting expedition was as a deep-sea artist in a self-propelled, titanium submersible along the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, where the fish of great depths are beyond the reach of sunlight. These organisms are visible under such conditions because some of the body

appendages of colonial squid and jellyfish are transparent, with photophores that attract prey.

I recommend without reservation this delightful and informative book as a companion for any naturalist visiting the lower Atlantic coast and through the Bahama Islands. It makes a great companion too for the larger, heavier *The Curious Mister Catesby*.

Literature Cited

Neston, E.C., and D.J. Elliott. 2015. *The Curious Mister Catesby. A Wormsloe Foundation Nature Book.* The University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia, USA.

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