

of co-adventurers are meandering somehow, understanding their locale, and their movements, would add so much to this book.

Like any good naturalist, Winn keeps notes, not only of what she saw, but where and when. Most of this information is transferred to the book, though uncharacteristically, the years of the observations are not. Some will find this a weak point, I didn't. After all, in the short time span (a few years) of her observations, there will not be much change from year to year. Additionally, this book is a non-fiction, natural history-based storybook, not a formal repository of scientific data, so I personally don't see any disadvantage of not recording the specific years here.

Readers of this book may come out with the idea that it is largely about the owls of Central Park – the wintering Long-eareds, the single Great Horned, the waxing and waning Eastern Screech-owls. I don't think so; this book is largely about the adventures of Winn and her colleagues to search for, monitor, and sometimes rescue these owls. As with many adventures, finding the target is only the satisfying end – the stories Winn tells are about the people and the interactions both among themselves and with their quarry. The owls give them purpose, but the stories are about the Central Park naturalists.

Many naturalists can point to one field trip, or one incident that turned them on to a particular field of natural history. "Bug Night" turned Winn and her colleagues into moth-ers (rhymes with "authors"). Read-

ers will reflect on their own personal moment when they became more than just a birder or amateur astronomer (or even a non-naturalist), and expanded their scope of interests to include bees, orchids or slime moulds. And this is part of the power of Winn's book – we share in the past adventures of the Central Park naturalists, including those pivotal life-moments, and simultaneously recall similar adventures of our own.

Much has been written about this book already, and invariably, the slug sex episode is brought up. In truth, it's a very small (but obviously charismatic) part of the book – I think included simply to describe something other than moths and owls, and as a bit of suspenseful comic relief. What really is confusing is that two-thirds of the one so-named chapter deals with cicadas and the wasp that feeds on them (the cicada killer) further proof that all the sliming, entwining, hermaphroditic gastropod encounters were just a segue between insects and birds.

Winn's book, as I see it, provides us with two important messages. One is that even in the depths of the largest cities like New York, there can be many natural wonders to experience. Second, the night is open to us to explore, sometimes through a telescope, sometimes through binoculars and sometimes through a jeweller's loupe. All we need now is a field guide to nocturnal nature.

RANDY LAUFF

Department of Biology, St. Francis Xavier University,
Antigonish, Nova Scotia B2G 2W5 Canada

Ecology and Conservation of the Birds of the Salton Sink: An Endangered Ecosystem

Edited by W. David Shuford and Kathy C. Molina. 2004. Cooper Ornithological Society. c/o Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, 439 Calle San Pablo, Camarillo, California, USA. 17.00 USD Paper.

The Salton Sea has long fascinated me. I have never seen it but it exists in my mind as a murky, sweaty spot where water melds with sky in the hazy distance, where rusted structures and dead trees perch along its salt-encrusted shore, where anarchic communities like Slab City show us our future. A quick Internet scan reveals it to be a handy metaphor, a swirl of contradictions and agrochemicals, much beloved and reviled, a birding hotspot, a vital migratory stopover on the Pacific flyway, and home of a National Wildlife Refuge named after Sonny Bono. The ecology and conservation of its biota, it seems, are a major part of its intrigue.

The Salton Sea sits in the Salton Sink, a basin whose complex history is integral to this work, which is number 27 in the *Studies in Avian Biology* series of the Cooper Ornithological Society. It is a compendium of 16 scholarly papers forming the proceedings of two symposia on the subject held in California in 1997 and 2000. The papers cover several themes: the biogeophysical history of the region, the extreme human im-

pacts upon it, the history of ornithology, the ecology and populations of the many bird species found there historically and now, and a conservation-oriented prescription for the future. The first two themes arise in practically every paper, for one can hardly discuss any aspect of the present ecosystem without reflecting on its colourful past.

Situated in the northwest-southeast valley system extending from the San Bernardino Mountains to the Gulf of California, therefore straddling the U.S.-Mexico border, the Salton Sink sits below sea level and contends with Death Valley as the hottest place in North America. At the northern end of the Colorado River Delta Region, the sink historically and prehistorically contained an ephemeral lake periodically filled by the flooding Colorado River. In more recent times dams and diversions have stifled the Colorado's flow. One last flood event in 1905 created the lake that is now the Salton Sea. However, instead of drying up as it had formerly done, it is replenished by runoff from irrigated agricultural fields. Whether in spite of, or because of this contribution, the Salton Sea is now 25 per cent more saline than the Pacific Ocean. But this is a simplistic summary. The editors' introductory paper, as

well as the paper "Linking the Salton Sea with its past: the History and Avifauna of Lake Cahuilla" will give you a much more thorough context-setting. We learn of the significance of the Salton Sink not only to its immediate surroundings but as a piece of the Colorado River Delta Region, itself radically altered over the last century.

As the authors of "History of Ornithological Exploration of the Salton Sink" point out, thanks to a strong naturalist tradition among earlier visitors to the region, studies began there before the present Salton Sea was created. This paper, and "Population changes and biogeographic affinities of the birds of the Salton Sink, California/Baja California" express the status, ecology and changes over a remarkably compact time period. The permanent water body has been in place for only 100 years, and ornithologists have been observing there, to varying degrees, for most of that time.

The Salton Sink is important for its locally breeding species (it hosts several regionally significant species and subspecies); as a migratory stopover or wintering territory for huge numbers of landbirds, waterbirds, waterfowl and shorebirds; and for its numerous records of vagrant or visiting pelagic and waterbirds via the Gulf of California. Not surprisingly, wetlands and associated species account for much of the focus of these papers. However, all bird groups present get some coverage, including landbirds with their dependence on riparian zones, and Burrowing Owls, whose population rose as land was converted by irrigation from Sonoran desert to agricultural.

Two additional papers discuss disease patterns: type C avian botulism, and the largest as-yet documented die-off of Eared Grebes which remained, at time of

publishing, unexplained. Avian cholera was present in some birds, high amounts of contaminants in others, but nothing had yet satisfactorily accounted for the extent of the die-off.

In the final paper, "The Salton Sea: A Conservation Conundrum or Paradigm for Success?" the editors discuss just that: do the region's complicated past and present mean it will ultimately be impossible to restore and maintain a healthy ecosystem, or is this a living laboratory leading to a model that can succeed here, and elsewhere? There remain many problems to solve, they admit, and all manner of social and political challenges.

As a compilation and analysis of baseline and other studies, this work should be an important part of the scientific literature for the region. It would also serve, if not as a model, at least as a reflection piece for environmental conservation workers anywhere, and certainly in locations analogous to this one, wherever they may be. The volume is consistently edited, the papers well-written. Although technical, they are not loaded with jargon. Abstracts are in English and Spanish. The citations from all the papers are combined in one "Literature Cited" section, making a very handy, comprehensive bibliography. One expects this type of work to be aimed at scientific and other professionals, but given the diverse interests in this region, with its large, transnational population and vanishing natural habitats, I believe it is a great service that this collection is readable enough to engage a curious and concerned public as well.

BEV MCBRIDE

574 Tweedsmuir Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1Z 5P2 Canada

Amur Tiger

By D. Prynne, Russian Nature Press (<http://www.rusnatpress.org.uk/>). 200 pages. 33 USD.

This very nice book gives great and entertaining information on the fascinating Amur Tiger. It is devoted to the great Russian naturalist and tiger expert: E. N. Matyushkin. This well-written and balanced text shows that this wildlife and conservation subject is a rather complex one: it deals not only with the vast Soviet Russian history, but also with today's Russia, with China as well as with a diverse set of stakeholders, including American and industrial ones (e.g., NGOs [non-government organizations] supported by Exxon Mobil and Shell; complete list is given in the Appendix). Interspersed with biological details are the nice and fascinating translated Russian writings by V.K. Arseniev, N.A. Baykov and others about Amur Tigers, their habitats and haunts (just the authors of these text sections alone are already worth several books). Amur Tigers live primarily in the Primorye region, Russian Far East, with Sikhote Alin and Amur river as its core, and the bordering China and North Korea region. This

region is part of the Pacific Rim and offers a unique biodiversity with many endemic and fascinating species (the mountain range of Sikhote Alin has over 1000 plant species for instance).

The English author is familiar with these subjects and presents us a well-balanced text and scholastic tiger information.

This book makes for a great case that western-style development is in direct conflict with splendid animals like the tiger. China's tiger population is already on the verge of extinction, and all Tiger populations world-wide are either extinct, or significantly reduced in their distribution and population. Only the Russian stock is the largest, and currently somewhat expanding (urbanization, global warming and intense resource use in this region are making its fate worse though).

This informative book focuses also on traditional tiger biology and habitat descriptions. I like the sections on prey, which support the case to consider the entire food chain and ecosystem for a meaningful conservation management. The text makes for a nice and