

A Photographic Guide to Seashore Life in the North Atlantic – Canada to Cape Cod

By J. D. Sept. 2008. Princeton University Press, 41 William St., Princeton, New Jersey 08540 USA 224 pages. 19.95 USD.

I have long believed that a real naturalist is interested in all life. Some of my birder friends refer to the plants that birds perch on as “green stuff.” I think that such an attitude is a sad loss because there are many wonderful, non-avian things to see on this earth. There are a lot of top quality choices for books on birds, plants and mammals. There is a more modest choice for reptiles, butterflies and dragonflies. There is not much available, however, on seashore life, so any book is welcome. Sept’s guide covers most of the common species found on rocky shores, sandy shores, mud beaches, and floating docks.

This guide covers a wide range of organisms from worms, jellies and sea anemones, through clams and crabs, to seaweeds, lichens and seashore plants. Indeed, the author portrays examples from 15 phyla. With the introductory section it is a Course 101 for shore life. Each species is illustrated with high quality, clear photographs, supported by well-written text. The author often uses the correct scientific term but adds a simple explanation in parentheses [phycoerythrin (algal red pigment)] making the text easy to follow.

This book brings back memories of many old “friends.” The Moon Jellies and Beroe’s Comb Jellies I saw floating off shore, the limpets, sea-snails and whelks in the tide pools and the Knotted Wrack cascading off the rocks. It reminded me of one of the most fascinating presentations I ever experienced. It was an explanation of the sex life of seaweed given in a swirling rock pool just behind the Peggy’s Cove lighthouse. While the author does not give this complex story *per se* there are hints in some of the algae accounts.

The book includes about 225 common species. I estimate that if you walked for an hour along a typi-

cal Nova Scotia beach you could find 20 to 30 species with ease. As the book is only 21.5 × 14 × 1.5 cm it would be easy to carry along. For the Common Periwinkle [a very tasty little beast] the photographs give a good sense of size, colour, shape and variability. These are easy to compare with the photographs of the Smooth and Rough periwinkles. Nearby you might find a beige “seaweed” made of felt. Look up Leafy Bryozoan. Push through the wrack and you will likely find a few scud, little shrimp-like critters. Keep going and you will surely find some young Rock Crabs or one of the hermit crabs. Now I have an urge to get to a beach and try poking around with this book in hand. The trouble is I am off to the Pacific next.

The author gives a brief overview of various intertidal habitats, such as sand beaches, mud flats, rocky shores and other micro-habitats. He also includes a guide to the best places in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. While the locations given are very good, almost anywhere along the coast will have a good range of species.

As much as I enjoyed this book, there is one disappointment. The author did not include any plankton. The zooplankton from the Bay of Fundy are among the most beautiful creatures on earth. Surely someone can buy one of the new digital microscopes and create a book on this neglected part of wildlife.

For \$20 this book is a great buy. Useful and useable, it will be an asset to any naturalist who wants to understand shore life in full. Better yet take a child along and get them interested – tidal pool creatures are easier to observe than flying birds or diving mammals.

A visit to Sept’s website at <http://www.septphoto.com> is also worth the effort.

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BOTANY

Glistening Carnivores: The Sticky-Leaved Insect-Eating Plants

By Stewart McPherson. 2008. Redfern Natural History Productions, Poole, Dorset, England. 392 pages, 79.99 USD, Cloth.

Stewart McPherson must love carnivorous plants. This is his sixth book dedicated to plants that catch, kill and digest insects – and even small animals, if you will. McPherson’s earlier works, all published by Redfern Natural History Productions, focused on the global diversity and ecology of the carnivorous plants. Three volumes were dedicated to the pitcher plants the largest and most spectacular of carnivorous plants.

His most recent volume highlights the sticky-leaved, insect-eating plants whose specialized leaves secrete sparkling droplets of sticky glue that trap insects; beauty to the human eye, but a drop of death to the unwary insect.

It was none other than Charles Darwin who definitively established the insectivorous or carnivorous nature of *Drosera* in his work *Insectivorous Plants* published in 1875. McPherson’s first chapter considers this relatively unknown passion of Charles Darwin. Subsequent chapters examine the botanical clas-

sification of sticky-leaved carnivorous plants, their trapping mechanisms, evolution, and known mutualistic relationships with arthropods.

The bulk of the book examines the seven known genera of sticky-leaved carnivores. Most readers may be familiar with the sundews (*Drosera*) that make up at least 188 species and that occur on every continent except Antarctica. McPherson dedicates a chapter to each of the seven genera of sticky-leaved carnivorous plants: *Byblis*, *Drosera*, *Drosophyllum*, *Ibicella*, *Pinguicula*, *Roridula* and *Triphyophyllum*. He describes each genus in terms of botanical history, plant structure, distribution and habitat, and general ecology. The final two chapters examine issues related to habitat loss and threat of extinction and to cultivation and horticulture.

McPherson's travels to the global hinterland and collaboration with botanical specialists the world over enrich this book. Complementing the text are 279

exquisite photos of various sticky-leaved species, many published for the very first time. A short but helpful glossary plus a specialized bibliography complement the text.

We are increasingly aware of the loss of Earth's biodiversity – a loss that is often irreparable and final. We seem unable to reverse the tide. However, maybe it will be books like this one that will provide a glimmer of hope. It is the progeny of an author whose passion for a marvellous and exquisite group of plants shines forth throughout these pages. If you are a devotee of carnivorous plants, this book is for you. If you just love plants, this book will carry you into an exotic world – a world that invites appreciation, care and maybe even love.

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Trees and Shrubs of Minnesota

By Welby R. Smith. 2008. State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and University of Minnesota Press, 111 Third Avenue South, Suite 290, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401-2520 USA. 640 pages, 59.95 USD, Cloth.

Spectacular, comprehensive, user-friendly – this book is a must for everyone interested in trees and shrubs. Obviously it is about Minnesota but don't despair – the boreal forest and prairie regions of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario (and most other surrounding areas) have the same woody plants that occur in Minnesota. This means that the keys, descriptions, identification notes, natural history notes, and, most importantly, numerous (actually 1027) spectacular photographs will still be totally useful. This is an unbelievable buy!

The book covers all native (present prior to settlement by Europeans) and naturalized (non-native but now established and reproducing without human assistance) species of woody plants (506 trees, shrubs and vines) in the state of Minnesota. The objectives and basis for the book are outlined in a short preface. The work is intended to appeal to a broad audience. A very useful introduction follows. The maps of original vegetation, ecological provinces, climate and substrate type, are extremely valuable for all surrounding regions as well as providing an essential context for understanding distribution in the state. The book is not without surprises. A few pages in the introduction on the importance of fire in determining vegetation are unusually clear and help to provide an understanding of ecological processes. A page on forest change since settlement is also illuminating. I would like to have seen a little more about the devastating impact of alien woody plants on native ecosystems and perhaps also some warning about introduction and cultivation of non-woody native species. For more information regarding Canada see Catling (1997). Some details

on the history of the study of woody plants in the state might also have been of interest.

Following the introduction are easy to use keys to the genera. Occasional reference to an adequate glossary at the back of the book may be necessary to use this and other keys. The species are organized by their scientific names. This results in the separation of similar species such as Black Locust and Honey Locust, but of course there are compensating advantages. Where a number of species occur in the same genus a few pages of introduction and a key are provided. Coloured tabs on the edge of the pages are the same for all members of a genus. For each species there is a page of text, including a description, and notes on identification and natural history. A few things might be added to the identification notes here and there. For example, the absence of two white lines on the underside of the leaf of Canada Yew helps to distinguish it from Hemlock and Balsam Fir. Potential improvements are minor and the keys and identification aids are very good. Both state and North American distribution maps also appear on the text page. The state maps are based on herbarium specimens.

Opposite the text is a page of colour photographs of fruit, flowers, bark, leaves, and whole plants. This is often accompanied by a habit drawing by Vera Ming Wong, who also provided helpful comparable drawings of leaves of many species. The photographs are of excellent quality and in seconds will answer questions like "how do flowers of red maple differ from those of sugar maple." The book concludes with an 8-page glossary, an 8-page bibliography and an index to common and scientific names.

As soon as a comprehensive book becomes available, it results in a surge of interest and exploration in the subject area. There will be new information on