

north. The Epilogue, added especially for this translation, tells how Claude was forced to move back south in August 2006 after he became partially disabled by multiple sclerosis.

Rob Sanders of Greystone Books deserves commendation for agreeing to publish this English translation of a book that first appeared in French in 2000. The

compelling story is told in sixty short chapters, averaging only four pages each. An ideal length for a bedside table, much preferable to watching the grisly television news before one turns out the light.

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### Return to Warden's Grove: Science, Desire, and the Lives of Sparrows

By Christopher Norment. 2008. University of Iowa Press, 119 West Park Road, 100 Kuhl House, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1000. Hardcover. 215 pages. 26 USD.

I was attracted to this book because Chris Norment and I share a love of maps, of reading, of banding birds, of subarctic Canadian history, and a special fondness for Harris's Sparrows. We both admired Marguerite Heydweiler Baumgartner, whose 1933 studies of Harris's Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows near Churchill, Manitoba, helped inspire this book. Indeed, *Warden's Grove* is a worthy response to Baumgartner's challenge that "some intrepid young naturalist will elect to fill in the many remaining gaps in our knowledge of this bird of mystery." Norment has produced a fascinating book about studying Harris's Sparrow in what was then one of the remotest spots in the Canadian barren-land wilderness.

Warden's Grove is part of a series of "sightline books", classed by Iowa University Press as "literary nonfiction" – hence, not as science. Personally, I would have preferred a bit more science and less introspection, more hard facts and fewer attempts at self-analysis, but I have already seen two other reviews that praised what I disliked.

Norment first experienced Warden's Grove when he overwintered there in 1977-78, as a member of a six-man expedition that canoed 2200 miles from the Yukon to Hudson Bay. His interest in Harris's Sparrows and romantic recollections of the unrivalled isolation of Warden's Grove led him to return there for three successive summers, 1989 to 1991. The book describes the adventures and difficulties of living in remote Grizzly Bear country, some 310 floatplane

miles from Yellowknife and at that time 180 miles from the nearest human neighbour. This book was written more than a decade after his research, yet he fails to tell us that diamond mines are today just outside the margin of his "nearest-neighbour circle."

While *Warden's Grove* vividly describes the difficulties in research on Harris's Sparrows, it also shares interesting facts about a bird which, in 1931, was the last species in North America to have its nest and eggs discovered. Among other things, we learn that the eggs, laid by females with an average weight of 33.7 g, have an average mass of 3.09 g. The average height of vegetation at the nest is 47.6 cm. Parental feeding rates of the Harris's Sparrow approach 13 trips per hour, compared to 16 for the White-crowned Sparrow. Norment's studies, however, provide no clue to the cause of the decline in wintering Harris's Sparrow populations in the U.S. mid-west. Nor can Norment come up with an answer for how the nestling sparrows stayed almost completely insect free, while he and his assistant were plagued by large numbers of blackflies.

I admire Norment's writing skills. I share his admiration of the Harris's Sparrow, which he describes as unremarkable yet miraculous. I share his concern that our generation lives mostly in a world of noise; that we seek to obliterate time, distance, silence and space; that we demand immediate gratification. *Warden's Grove* is all the more interesting because the wilderness and isolation will soon be no more.

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### The Archaeology of Animal Bones – Second Printing

By Terry O'Connor. 2008. Texas A&M University Press, John H. Lindsey Building, Lewis Street 4354 TAMU College Station, Texas 77843-4354. 206 pages. 29.95 USD Paper.

Coincident with reviewing this book, an archaeology class was for the first time using the skeletal collection which I curate, to identify bones from a Mi'kmaq midden. Therefore, I have been getting a pleasant overload of zooarchaeology from two fronts – a thoroughly enjoyable experience. This review, of course, focuses only on Terry O'Connor's ability to convey information and passion about the discoveries, extractions

and problems associated with interpreting past peoples' lives by the animal bones which they left behind.

At just over 200 pages, O'Connor's book is a sampler of many aspects of zooarchaeology; because of its size, it simply cannot go into detail in the chosen topics. The author's own experiences, many of which are appropriately included in these pages, are a valuable contribution and give the book a sense of reality.

The preface has a prosaic passage, "This book is not intended to be a didactic account that explains *how* animal bones ought to be examined and studied.

Instead, the aim is to show *why* this field of scholarship is an important one". In reality, the *why's* were relatively few, and dominantly found in the first chapter, *Why study a lot of old bones?* However, even this chapter barely had any of the promised *why's*. I think the author could have left out this attempt at philosophy and moved right into the down and dirty of zooarchaeology. Ironically, there were a lot of *how's*: many chapters were devoted to *how* archaeologists sort, age, quantify, and more; most methods were treated as overviews (which is appropriate in such a short book), with ample references to the primary literature.

As one would expect in any book on animal bones, there is an early chapter introducing the reader to bone (the material), the bones themselves and the sum of all the bones, the skeletons. Sadly, the orientation diagram of a bird skeleton has two mistakes (the fibula is mislabelled, digits of the manus are misnumbered), not a great start to a book on bones – the second printing, no less. The text of this chapter on orientation to the skeleton contains misleading statements (what is a "higher" vertebrate?) and outright mistakes (e.g., pectoral girdles do not attach the limbs to the vertebral column; caudal vertebrae are not "often reduced to a simple short rod of bone," etc.).

The study of all the events that take a bone from the living animal through to the researcher's bench is known as taphonomy. In addition to orienting the reader to bones, a must-have in a book such as this is an outline of taphonomic processes; without this knowledge, an archaeologist cannot correlate earlier peoples'

use of animals with the bones themselves. O'Connor gives a succinct description of these processes, with several examples (hypothetical and real) to allow the reader to understand that the bones dug up are not exactly as they were dropped by the people who used them.

Many methods used by archaeologists for dealing with animal bones are described, often with both pros and cons explained. Where appropriate, the techniques are compared with those used for working with ancient human remains. O'Connor has also done a good job of bringing in the literature from other disciplines that would clearly bear on the interpretation of, for example, diseases in animals.

This book has not been written for the specialist; my feeling is that it has been written with the interested novice or hobbyist, or perhaps even first year university students in mind. That said, it would have been a very useful addition to have, perhaps on the inside back cover, a geologic time scale; O'Connor liberally uses terms such as *Holocene* and *Neolithic*, terms that are undoubtedly quite meaningful to experts, but in and of themselves, relatively meaningless (other than "old") to the non-specialist. I did enjoy the odd interjection of humour – just like O'Connor's descriptions of his real forays into middens, the humour gave the book personality, a thoroughly appropriate quality.

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## Snakebit: Confessions of a Herpetologist

By Leslie Anthony. 2008. Greystone Books. #201–2323 Quebec Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V5T 4S7 Canada. xi + 292 pages. 29.95 CAD.

There really are two kinds of people: those that like snakes and those that get the heeby-jeebies even at the mention of snakes. Leslie Anthony is certainly in the smaller, but more enlightened, former group. With a PhD specializing in herpetology, Anthony has caught more than his fair share of snakes. In this lively volume, he mixes personal memoir and adventures in exotic locales with a healthy dose of herpetology.

Anthony sets the stage with a prologue of discovering European Adders (*Vipera berus*) while skiing north of the Arctic Circle in Finnish Lapland. From there Anthony takes the reader through adventures more or less chronologically, beginning with childhood hunts for snakes in the suburban wilds of Willowdale and Don Mills, Ontario. Along the way he introduces a veritable who's who of Canadian herpetology.

Anthony completed a master's degree with Dr. Jim Bogart of the University of Guelph, as part of the team working on the genetics of the Blue-spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*) and Jefferson Salamander

(*A. jeffersonianum*) complex. He gives a detailed explanation of the current understanding of these strange unisexual hybrids, although is somewhat vague about his own work. The most vivid scene from his days in Bogart's lab is being attacked by a two-metre Hispaniolan Boa (*Epicrates striatus*). Anthony continued his work on the Blue-spotted Salamander complex in his PhD studies at the Royal Ontario Museum under the supervision of Dr. Bob Murphy, the "Punk King of Herpetology." Along the way he participated in the world's first phylogenetic rock opera, ROMMY, loosely based upon The Who's rock opera Tommy.

The highlights of the book are Anthony's stories of adventure on collecting expeditions with Dr. Bob: ambushed by bandits in Baja, Mexico, adventures with cobras and kraits along the Khe Moi River of Vietnam, and vipers in Armenia. In between, Anthony finds time to explore the Red-sided Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis parietalis*) dens in Manitoba and hunt for Northern Pacific Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus oreganus*) in British Columbia.

Anthony abandoned academia for travel and adventure writing, and his journalistic prowess is clearly evi-