

Book Reviews

ZOOLOGY

An Odyssey in Time: The Dinosaurs of North America

By Dale A. Russell. 1989. National Museum of Natural Sciences and University of Toronto Press, Toronto. 239 pp., illus. \$45.00.

This book will appeal strongly to two groups of people: those in search of a truly handsome coffee table book with a wealth of beautiful pictures; and those with considerable prior knowledge of Mesozoic reptiles who want an authoritative, up-to-date, non-technical summary of the subject. The latter group will relish the text, which is not illustrated.

This assertion will surprise anyone leafing through the book for the first time. But the fact is the pictures merely decorate the text, they do not illustrate it. I have never before seen a book in which text and pictures were so loosely coupled. Nowhere in the text is the reader asked to see Plate so-and-so; indeed the pictures are unnumbered, and the legends so terse as to be meaningless.

The pictures are of five kinds. There are 15 paintings of living dinosaurs in their habitats, by Eleanor Kish; each occupies a whole page or a two-page spread, and segments from them are repeated, for no apparent reason, in the text. There are numerous scenes of famous fossil sites, such as Horseshoe Canyon near Drumheller, and the shores of the Minas Basin in Nova Scotia; the legends list the geological formations exposed in these scenes, but prior knowledge is necessary if one is to distinguish the named strata. There are photographs (with no scale markers) of imbedded fossils and fossil tracks. There are a number of "pretty pictures", e.g., a sunset in Indonesia, and a herd of elephants in Zambia; why these pictures appear is a mystery.

Lastly, there are maps, which are even more mysterious. They are outline maps of various

regions, overprinted with multicoloured mosaics. The meaning of the colours is unexplained; no doubt the blues are water, but the yellows, oranges and browns are evidently not contour layer colours; what are they? The maps bear no names and none of the places mentioned in the text are shown on them.

Maps to illustrate the text are sorely needed. The text emphasizes geography; for instance, page 37 tells us how, 225 million years ago, the earth's crust shifted along geologic faults extending from New Brunswick to Morocco, causing a rupture between North America and West Africa; an arm of the Mediterranean advanced westward over northern Africa. Submarine salt deposits formed which now persist in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia; crustal sinking produced rift valleys stretching from Alabama to Nova Scotia. On the same page is a brightly coloured map of the southwestern USA!

To enjoy the text, therefore, the reader must have other books on hand. A recent discussion of plate tectonics, illustrating how the continents and oceans have changed since Permian times would be helpful. Also, an introductory guide to dinosaur history that includes some sort of family tree (this book has none); a diagram showing the anatomical difference between the bird-hipped and the lizard-hipped dinosaurs (there isn't one here). And line drawings to illustrate the Triassic therapsids and sauropsids here given such embarrassingly whimsical names as "cowturtles," "swinelizards," "owliguanas," and "wolf-crocodiles;" these, too, are left to our imagination. Only 17 dinosaur species are actually portrayed in Kish's magnificent paintings.

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The Nature of Birds

By Adrian Forsyth. 1988. Camden House Publishing, Camden East, Ontario. \$29.95 (hard cover), \$19.95 (soft cover).

Birds have a special place in our hearts. We only have to reminisce about the deep feeling of intimacy with nature triggered by the long and modulated complaint of the Common Loon or by the flutelike song of a Hermit Thrust. We, as humans, perceive birds differently than we perceive other vertebrates. Poetic notions of freedom, love, and beauty always spring to mind when we think of them. In this book, Adrian Forsyth gives a more rational perspective of

the nature of birds. In a series of lively and nicely written essays, he demystifies the scientific work of professional ornithologists and, as a consequence, diffuses part of the romantic aura we attach to birds.

The text is abundantly illustrated with stunningly beautiful colour photographs which only confirm what we already know about birds: they are the most photogenic of all vertebrates.

Good scientific work has little to do with our romantic perception of birds. In fact, the scientific literature on birds is about as poetic as a phone book. Why is this so? Simply because any scientific



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