

Drinking Water: Refreshing Answers to All Your Questions

By James M. Symons. 1995. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, Texas. Canadian distributor U.B.C. Press, Vancouver. 160 pp., illus. Cloth \$36.95; paper \$16.95.

Although this book is one of a "Natural Environment Series", it is aimed at householders, not at naturalists. It is written in question-and-answer format, with 128 questions. Here is No. 120: "Does drinking water contain calories, fat, sugar, caffeine,

or cholesterol?" The answer is "No", accompanied by a sketch of a glass of water overprinted with a list of the above-named substances, each followed by "0 mg", and a list of the ingredients, to wit, hydrogen and oxygen. To be fair, some of the questions are mildly interesting.

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Eastern Deciduous Forest: Ecology and Wildlife Conservation

By Richard H. Yahner. 1995. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. xvii + 220 pp., illus. U.S. \$18.95.

It is difficult to know how to classify this book. Heavily burdened with references and with a dry writing style this thin volume is clearly not aimed at a general audience. And yet, with its superficial treatment of the topics it can only make for a very junior level textbook.

Yahner is ambitious in his coverage. In 10 chapters he covers everything from the history of the eastern deciduous forest since the last ice age to the current ecological concerns over forest fragmentation, and the future of the forest. In between, he tackles succession, plant-animal interactions, biodiversity, and atmospheric threats such as acid rain. In trying to be all encompassing too often chapter sections resemble little more than lists of topics. More detailed examination of some of the studies

mentioned might have provided greater insight into the complexity of the issues. There are also a few careless mistakes in the text: typos and in one instance, the misuse of the word fauna when flora was intended.

The book also suffers from an obsessiveness with references. For example, the self-evident statement "Forests are an economic and a recreational treasure for all Americans" is supported by three references, occupying a full line of text!

Despite these problems, the book does provide a broad survey of forest ecology and perhaps would make a useful text for an introductory course in ecology.

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MISCELLANEOUS

River out of Eden

By Richard Dawkins. 1995. BasicBooks, New York. 172 + xiii pp. U.S. \$28.00.

Richard Dawkins is (in)famous for his perceptive and witty books on Darwinism, and so a reader approaches this one with anticipation. Those who have not previously read him will be delighted, but those already familiar with his previous writings will be disappointed. The title refers to the river of DNA coursing over the temporal landscape of biology. Dawkins expands on the central role of natural selection in this river, the nature of speciation, and the view of genetic material as information underlying complexity, embryology, and adaptation. He then takes a historical view in order to address issues of inbreeding, sexual reproduction, phylogenies, molec-

ular clocks, and an African Eve. Dawkins expounds his thorough-going adaptationism well by analyzing natural design, its gradual appearance with plenty of time and variation, and pertinent examples, especially from animal behaviour. Confounding those who search for purpose, he demonstrates the blind effects of natural selection maximizing genetic survival through instances of sex ratio, competition, and the evolution of senescence, but is adamant in drawing no moral. Finally, Dawkins focusses on "the replication bomb", the consequences of molecular replication exploding with information, like the memes of a chain letter, with life crossing a series of thresholds from genotypes through phenotypes and consciousness to space travel.



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