

pated in the 1979 survey), and the personal observations of Jack Christie and Tom Huff during their years of residence in the County. Included for each species is a spot distribution map giving Prince Edward County records and functional sketches aid visual identification. Tribute is justly made to Mike Oldham and the Ontario Herpetofaunal Summary for compilation of records from these diverse sources and making them available.

Five turtles, seven snakes, five salamanders, eight frogs (including one toad), a total of 25 species are documented. An additional five unconfirmed species (four snakes and one frog), based on reports unsubstantiated by voucher specimens, are also given accounts in a separate section. These are followed by mention of four whose status is purely hypothetical. All species are illustrated with black-and-white sketches of variable success by the author, best for frogs and poorest for the scaleless and somewhat bloated snakes.

The afterword pays tribute to the persistence of amphibians and reptiles despite habitat degradation, ignorance and neglect of consideration for their requirements, and outright persecution and exploitation. It also highlights the persistence of those interested in the local herpetofauna and the particular value of the Ontario Herpetofaunal Summary and its role in collating and preserving observations of lasting value.

This book is an unabashedly a debt repayment to a father "who, by turning stones and woodland logs, uncovered his gift of curiosity that all of us carry still". Jack would be proud of the result. It should also please all who contributed directly and indirectly both in 1979 or either long before/after this survey by making more accessible the records of their efforts.

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Orioles, Blackbirds, and their Kin: A Natural History

By Alexander F. Skutch. 1996. The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona. 312 pp., illus. Cloth U.S. \$50.; paper U.S. \$21.95.

A good review of this book appeared in the *Wilson Bulletin* in 1996 (Volume 108, page 809). In it, C. R. Blem notes: "Who says there are no more heroes to emulate? Mine easily could be Alexander F. Skutch. At [a] time when study of whole organisms is considered passé by some, Dr. Skutch has produced a masterful account of the natural history of a very important group — the blackbirds (and after his 90th birthday!)."

Until recently, the American "blackbirds" (bobolink, blackbirds, meadowlarks, orioles, and allies) comprised the family Icteridae, and one referred to the species in that family as Icterids. Now, these birds are in the subfamily Icterinae, of the larger family Emberizidae (including many other species). Skutch's book, as he notes in the preface, covers those members of the former family Icteridae. He adds: "'Icterid' is probably the most precise and convenient designation ... and will be used throughout this book."

This is a book which I intend to read leisurely, for enlightenment and enjoyment, not just to write a review, for I've long had an interest in this group of birds. And I've already learned that it's easy to read. Skutch has brought together a lot of information (there's a 5-page bibliography), but the text looks

and reads more like a novel than a scientific treatise. The author's interest in these birds and his excitement in studying them in the field as well as learning about them through the observations of others is clear on almost every page. Still, it is Dr. Skutch's familiarity with many of his subjects in their native habitat that allows him to write so authoritatively and pleasantly. Of the Great-tailed Grackle, he states: "I delighted to watch their graceful maneuvers while they hovered, soared, and posed with dangling legs above the treetops, reminding me of gulls playing above a windy seashore."

Behaviour and ecology, food habits, relationship with other species, appearance, and vocalizations are described with an almost effortless style. Thirty-three lively scratchboard illustrations and a colour cover by Dana Gardner depict nearly that number of species. This book will serve as a stimulus and guide to further work on this group of birds, some of which are little known. One chapter, "Some South American Icterids", covers several species "that await more prolonged or thorough studies." I'll probably never get to South America, but thanks to Dr. Skutch, this book allows me to learn about and enjoy some of the birds in that distant land where he has spent so many years.

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