

## *Book Reviews*

**Eighteenth-Century Naturalists of Hudson Bay.** 2003. By *Stuart Houston, Tim Ball, and Mary Houston.* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, Quebec, and Kingston, Ontario. Hardcover, 16 x 23 cm, 333 pages, 8 colour plates, 38 black and white illustrations, 3 maps. \$49.95 Cdn. ISBN 0-77352285-9.

This impeccably researched volume states in its introduction that one of its goals is to “make amends for past neglect: the outstanding achievement of a small group of early weather observers and natural-history collectors around Hudson Bay have long been overlooked by most naturalists and historians”.

Indeed, the scientific achievement of the men who accompanied the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) explorations and fur trade provides a remarkable story of a rich legacy of both pioneering North American natural history and science, early encounters with Canada's First Nations, and much insight into the early environmental impacts of these European explorers as they established settlements in this new frontier.

The meteorological and weather data recorded at the Hudson Bay trading posts has been collected meticulously and continuously for over three centuries, perhaps the longest continuous series anywhere in the world. In all of North America, the ornithological discoveries of the Hudson Bay Company naturalists rank second only to the work of Mark Catesby in South Carolina in describing new species of birds to sci-

ence—nineteen species of birds (and nine additional subspecies) were newly described to science by the collections of the eighteenth century Hudson Bay naturalists.

Drawing on years of extensive research of the archives of the Hudson Bay Company and the Royal Society, the authors piece together the fur trade service and scientific accomplishments of Alexander Light, James Isham, Humphrey Marten, Andrew Graham, Thomas Hutchins, Moses Norton, Samuel Hearne and Peter Fidler.

The introduction frames the story by giving a brief but very useful history of the Hudson Bay Company, a sense of the place occupied by the Hudson Bay territory in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the people (both Hudson Bay Company men and their First Nations counterparts) who plied the fur trade, and the temper of the times in which they lived.

This is followed by a chapter on the connection of the Hudson Bay naturalists to the European scientific community of the eighteenth century through the Royal Society. This close connection provided encouragement and allowed for the thor-

ough examination and publication of the natural history collections from Hudson Bay by Sir Hans Sloane, George Edwards, Carolus Linnaeus, Johann Reinhold Forster, Thomas Pennant, and John Latham, among others.

Each of the eight prominent Hudson Bay naturalists is then profiled in a chapter on their own lives, Hudson Bay Company service, and their contributions to natural history, science and anthropology. Those interested in the history of Ontario ornithology will find the chapters on Humphrey Marten and Andrew Graham, the first two ornithological collectors in the province, particularly informative. The authors also explain in detail how the accomplishments of these eight naturalists came to be, for so long, either confused or overlooked in the subsequent natural history literature.

In one of the most important contributions of the book, the authors provide a firm rationale for the thesis that the manuscripts of Andrew Graham and Thomas Hutchins support the conclusion that, in the final analysis, their collective works represented a product of collaboration rather than an act of plagiarism by Hutchins, as had been previously postulated.

This is followed by a chapter summarizing the collective natural history contributions of all eight men (including a comprehensive tabulation of the bird specimens sent back from Hudson Bay as revealed in the published literature

and ten Hudson Bay Company manuscripts), a chronology of their collections, and a synopsis of the errors and omissions contained in all previously published overviews of the Hudson Bay collections.

A chapter on climatology discusses the weather and meteorological data from Hudson Bay and its unique usefulness in helping to reconstruct past patterns. The final chapter contrasts the weather and natural history discoveries of the Hudson Bay area with those of the Charles Town, South Carolina, area of the same period.

Seven appendices provide an additional wealth of information. These include: a log of sailing ships that visited York Factory, 1716-1892; a history of the provenance of the Hudson Bay Company journals by Deidre Simmons; an extensive "detective story" on the ten manuscripts of Andrew Graham/Thomas Hutchins in the HBC archives and how they reveal the collaboration of the two naturalists; the HBC fur catch records and how they demonstrate the ten year population cycle now known to involve Snowshoe Hare, Lynx, Muskrat, Pine Marten, Red Fox, Fisher, Ruffed Grouse, Spruce Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Great Horned Owl and Northern Goshawk (and a history of the study of these cycles); a review of the statistics of the nineteenth-century trade in swan skins and quills and how it led to the near extinction of the Trumpeter Swan; an interesting account of how the Canada

Goose got its name before there was an official Canada; and an extensive list of eighteenth century Cree names for birds, mammals and fish.

All of the chapters and appendices provide extensive footnotes (forty pages worth!) so that original sources can be traced by the reader. In addition, on the date of the book's launch, the authors established a web site where they have provided the reader with supplementary natural history documents from the HBC archives that are referred to extensively within the book <<http://www.mcup.mcgill.ca/books/houston/eighteenth-century>>.

The writing in this book is both well-organized and easy to read. It is surprisingly free of any typographical errors. The only one I noted was that the header for the chapter on Andrew Graham misidentifies him as Alexander Graham.

This book is chock full of tidbits of information that should delight anyone interested in birds, such as: Humphrey Marten's establishment of Tree Swallow nest boxes as early as 1771 and his unsuccessful experiment to have a domestic hen incubate Sharp-tailed Grouse eggs; Samuel Hearne's

inherent understanding of molt-migrant Canada Geese over two centuries ago; the unfortunate failure of Forster to name Andrew Graham's Rusty Blackbird as a new species; Hutchins' habit, two centuries ago, of taking weights and measurements of birds and providing descriptions of their soft parts in life to accompany specimens; and Marten's collection of a Black-billed Magpie at Fort Albany!

Another bonus is the reproduction of eight plates in colour from George Edwards' *A Natural History of Birds*, including six species of birds collected by James Isham that were new to science (Great Blue Heron, Whooping Crane, Snow Goose, Surf Scoter, Red-necked Phalarope and Hudsonian Godwit).

Stuart Houston, Tim Ball and Mary Houston have gone to much loving effort to make amends for the past neglect of the Hudson Bay naturalists. This book will no doubt create many beneficiaries who will understandably consider that mission accomplished. I wholeheartedly recommend this book very highly and hope it generates much further interest in the archives of the Hudson Bay Company.

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