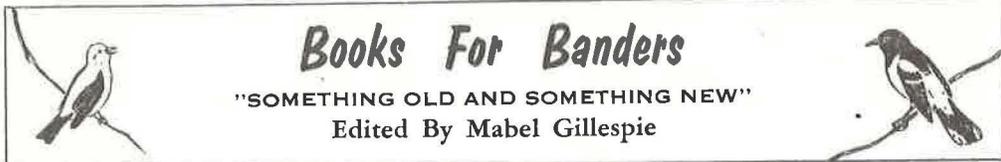


Books For Banders

"SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW"

Edited By Mabel Gillespie



Some of us who attended the annual EBBA meeting at New Brunswick in June of this year had the privilege of visiting the Hutcheson Memorial Forest where Rutgers University is conducting a long range ecological study. It then occurred to me that, since any bander is necessarily involved in ecosystems, it might be well to mention some books about ecology in this column. Therefore I wrote to Jeff Swinebroad asking him to suggest some titles, mentioning that I had not encountered any since "Rich Land, Poor Land" by Stuart Chase (Whittlesey House) and "Deserts on the March" by Paul B. Sears (University of Oklahoma Press), both of which were published more than twenty-five years ago.

Jeff replied that there weren't any books available. He mentioned a paperback by Eugene P. Odum in the Modern Biology Series of Holt, Rinehart and Winston. I haven't tracked it down yet, but in the course of browsing among the paperbacks I came upon "Where There Is Life" by Paul B. Sears, published in 1962 by Dell in Laurel Editions, sponsored by Science Service. This provided me with a new angle of approach: something old and something new by the same author.

Before embarking on a brief survey of Dr. Sears' two books, I should mention another suggestion of Jeff's: "The Natural Regulation of Animal Numbers" by David Lack. He also sent me a copy of the July 1964 publication "BioScience" which is a special issue on Ecology including articles by both Odum and Sears.

Both of the above mentioned books by Sears are easy to read and lack textbook stiltedness, but this fact in no way limits their effectiveness nor suppresses the urgency of their concern for conservation of natural resources. "Whatever else conservation may be, it involves the establishment of an efficient energy balance within our ecosystems." An ecosystem is defined as a "truly healthy landscape."

Sears' earlier book surveys the mistakes man has made in manipulating the land from the days of the earliest historical records to the time of the great financial depression and the disaster of the western dust bowl. Also are included the relatively few instances when good land practices have been followed. In the chapter on "Pests" we read that "when studies are made of the actual distribution of rodents in natural grassland, it is discovered that the number does not become significantly large until after the grassland has been more heavily grazed than it should be." Mention is made of the barbed wire fence that stopped the advance of a grasshopper plague. Actually the fence prevented overgrazing and the insects preferred the cropped areas.

Ecology is defined as the science which "treats of the relation between the individual living thing and the atmosphere and soil about it, and of course, the relations which exist between and among living things." When an ecologist enters a forest or a meadow he sees not merely what is there, but what is happening there."

This book is as pertinent today as at the date of publication with one striking exception. At that time it was thought that population in the United States was moving toward a static maximum, which would be reached about 1960 with 140 million. According to a yearbook which I have just consulted the population of our country reached 154 million in 1950 and 183 million in 1960.

The publisher refers to Sears' recent book as "a distinguished naturalist's introduction to ecology - the biology of the living landscape." It might be noted here that Dr. Sears is presently Professor of Botany and Conservation at Yale University. He notes that our population has doubled in a lifetime, reaching in 1960 over 160 million instead of the static 140 million forecast previously. "The human population having doubled in the past sixty years and being set to double again in less time than that, it might not be amiss to start present-day pupils gently by asking them to compute what would happen, starting with a single pair of robins that raised four to maturity, if the process continued for 32 generations."

Among bird banders I am sure there are a good number like myself who have had a minimum of supervised training in graduate or undergraduate work in the various branches of biological science. We pick up scattered bits of information here and there, often valuable; but often, also, disorganized. In "Where There Is Life" the subject of ecology is presented in orderly, connected fashion - a sort of skeleton of what might be covered in a college course. We may find in this book the missing links in our hit-or-miss survey of ecology.

From Chapter 9, "The Realm of the Living," I would like to borrow a few quotes. "The quest for order is a profound necessity. Even animals become neurotic in the midst of confusion." (There was a hint of observations along this line at the EBBA meeting.) "Science, with all its limitations, is the fruit of this quest, providing a discipline of method and expression." "Classification, however, is to the ecologist a tool, rather than a goal. His objective is to understand the play, and to do so he must know the actors. More important, he must know how each fits into the action and the part he performs." "But in employing that knowledge for immediate ends, he has become so absorbed in what he is doing that he has forgotten a much more important obligation. For the highest function of science is to give us an understanding of consequences."

The following remarks apply directly to us as bird banders. "There will never be enough professionals to provide the specialists we need

on every group..... Whoever finds it worth his while to learn all he can about a group of plants or animals will not only have an unending source of satisfaction, but is likely to help break the barriers of our ignorance."

A small paperback of 216 pages cannot give more than a mere outline of a subject. I would like to have found more about such things as DNA and the Krebs cycle. But the fundamental terms used in ecology, like entropy and uniformity, are defined. Finally, Dr. Sears' profound respect for the fundamental balances of nature amounts to a philosophy, if not a religion. Every chapter is permeated by veneration for the laws of nature and the universe. He is an evangelist crying for understanding of and humility before forces greater than ourselves.

313 Sharp Ave., Glenolden, Pa.

FRENCH CONSERVATION STAMP
By Ronald Leberman

My brother Bob and I have been collecting stamps for the last ten years. Last fall when he came home from Powdermill Nature Reserve (where he is employed as a bird bander and naturalist) we were checking over some newer stamps and found one that may be of interest to EBBA news readers.

The stamp (at right) is one of a set of four issued Nov. 12, 1960 by France to publicize wildlife protection in that country. The remaining three stamps of the set depict Puffins, Wild Ducks and Bee Eaters. The value of the stamp is about twenty cents unused.

The thing that took our eye immediately was the band drawn on the Lapwing's right leg, and the words meaning "Lapwing - Study of Migrations - Museum of Paris." Upon closer examination we found two netters removing Lapwings from nets in the background.

The stamp is in natural colors. We now are wondering if other countries have similar issues?

R.D.#1, Saeger Hill, Meadville, Pennsylvania

