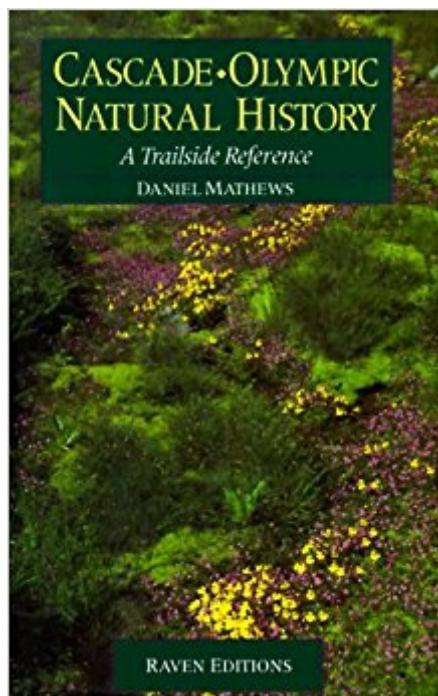


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Cascade-Olympic Natural History : A Trailside Reference



Synopsis

Book by Mathews, Daniel

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Book by Mathews, Daniel

I have already used this book extensively in the few weeks that I've owned it, both outdoors and while thinking about the outdoors at home. I am a total amateur with plant and tree identification, but this book's casual-yet-informed style has already taught me how to identify the most common local trees and more about their ecosystem (why one tree is more likely to grow in an area than another and which trees should win in the end) than I've bothered to think about before. For species of flora or fauna I'm familiar with, it's still worth looking them up to see what interesting facts the author learned first-hand and compiled. I can skip the identifying elements and learn why I see ravens on Hurricane Ridge and crows in Port Angeles rather than the other way around, or why the wolverine is also called the skunk-bear and why there might be hope for the re-expansion of its habitat. Its size is perfect for carrying anywhere, which also limits the breadth of its coverage. You will not be able to identify every bird or flower you come across, but instead you can learn which type of rock you're looking at and why it's there and then refer to which tree you're looking at and why it's the dominant local species or why it doesn't have fungus but the next one does and then maybe understand why the animal you passed by is here but not on the other side of the mountain. In other words, it will

give you a better general knowledge of our ecosystem and geology than any other single book I've been able to find on the Northwest.

I wanted to love this book. I was so prepared to gorge on the delightful tidbits included throughout the book. I wanted to glean every nugget I thought would be available in the well-laid out, perfect sized, text. Imagine my surprise to learn Ursus arctos horribilis is 6-8" long, 4 1/2" high, with a 3" tail and fore-claws. (Page 342) Or that "a longish spell in the caecum...releases vitamins which--" Which what?! Guess I'll never know; at least not from reading this book. (Page 307) The book is full of such errors and omissions. Of course I know a grizzly isn't 6 - 8 inches long, and I'm pretty sure the vitamins don't turn out to be lethal. But when I see such errors in a book I have to wonder what other flora and fauna are labeled and described incorrectly. I generally don't expect much from these types of texts in terms of spelling and grammar, and I forgive any such offenses easily. I assume the authors are experts in the field, not English majors. However, I do expect the information to be correct and complete. It does me little good to have an untrustworthy reference book which compels me to check other resources just to see if an unfamiliar plant is labeled correctly. I am, however, impressed enough that I would buy a corrected edition. That is why I begrudgingly give this text three stars.

Most of us who enjoy nature have relied upon "bird books" or other guides to the species at one time or another as we inquire about our surroundings. These dull but thorough reference books often make their topics LESS interesting, quelling the interests that they're supposed to serve. We look up our bird, animal or plant and then move on having learned little more than its Latin name. Ugh. This book shines like a beacon to future nature writers as it uses every description as the basis for a prosaic mini-essay; rewarding curiosity with enlightenment, fascination and delight. Imagine a reference book so enticing to read that you can't stop reading with just one description. Instead, the object of your curiosity serves as a mere starting point in the book; the first page of what often becomes a genuine sit-down-and-read-it experience. If every nature writer put this much love into their topics, the trails would be overrun with enthusiastic hikers. Here's hoping that the author visits your neck of the woods soon, and provides you with the same exuberant writing he's given us here in the Pacific Northwest.

This book is full of interesting facts and background information for common plants, fungi and animals that can be found in the region. Did you know that banana slugs have vestigial shells? That

cakes made from bulbs of the camas flower were almost as important as salmon to native Indians? This isn't the best book for identification (though there are sketches and quite a few color pictures), and neither does it go into great detail (impractical, given the scope of the book), but it's a great book to leaf through back at home to deepen your understanding and appreciation of the things you've seen.

One of the best all round resource books I've found. Everything you need without having to buy a bunch different books. It covers conifers, flowers, ferns, birds, fungi, reptiles, insects, fish, etc. A perfect trail book.

A good book; just not what I was expecting. Road Scholar had left out the subtitle and described it as "A delightful overall natural history book for the area" -- it is, in fact, a large field guide (large to carry with) with some additional information.

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