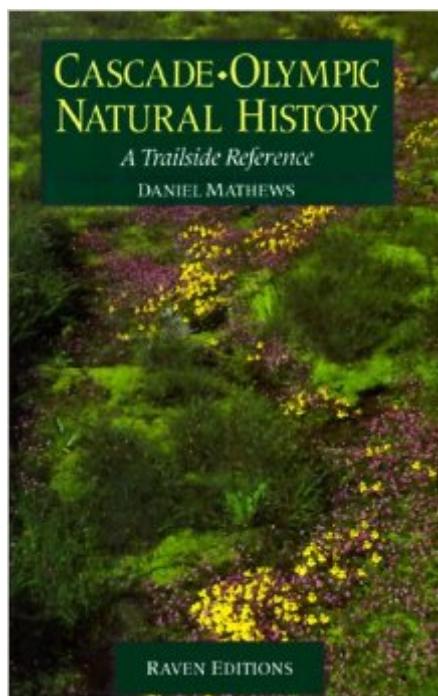


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Cascade-Olympic Natural History : A Trailside Reference



Synopsis

Book by Mathews, Daniel

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A Second edition of a classic. Mathews created a field guide that is a must have for every PNW adventurer. As a park ranger I find myself reaching for it daily to answer questions. The writing is superb and one finds oneself reading it by the fire on a cold winter day just because. I give this book as a gift more than any other item.

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.

I also have ordered this as a gift for several this year, including the revised edition for myself. Definitely not just a reference book but a great read also. I actually read the whole book, rather than just saving for information on specifics, when I got my first copy years ago.

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.

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.

I moved to Oregon from New Jersey in 1988 and began to seek out and learn about the natural world. This book was a huge part of that process and I carried my dog-eared copy wherever I went. It contains descriptions of individual species and essays about ecosystems, behavior, and natural processes. If you're visiting or new to the Pacific Northwest, or new to natural history, this is the one book you absolutely need.

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.

Unlike cut and dried Siera Club and Audubon field guides that attempt (unsuccessfully in my opinion) to regiment nature, this book contains information that falls in the category of lore. Not only are the pictures good, but the text sparkles with knowledge of the Northwest's flora and fauna and the author's own good humor. Put this in your backpack next time you head for the Cascades or Olympics and you will not be disappointed.

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