Seen the Wind and *Jake and the Kid*, and even Mazo de la Roche's Jalna novels which have enthralled at least two generations of teen-age girls?

But *The Republic of Childhood* is far more than a critical evaluation of individual works. Many contemporary concerns are grist for the author's mill--misguided nationalism, fadism, the "it doesn't matter what they read as long as they read" theory, the base materialism of publishers, the mediocrity of commercial series, the impact of new technology upon the Eskimo, the desirability of acquainting Canadian children with their own history. The book is not to be valued for its uniqueness alone--is there another critical guide to Canadian children's literature?--but for its comprehensiveness, its skillful definition of genre, and even its asperity. One suspects that Sheila Egoff, like the archetypal Victorian parent, mentally prefaces her chastisements with an assurance that "this hurts me more than it hurts you."

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Imaginative Zoology

SHIRLEY LORIMER

The Nature of Birds, The Nature of Mammals, and *The Nature of Fish* (in the series *The Illustrated Natural History of Canada*). Natural Science of Canada Ltd., 105 Bond St., Toronto, 1974. 160 pp. ea. $6.95 cloth.

On almost any bookshelf there is a commodious niche available for books of the type represented here. They are neither as large and heavy to handle nor as expensive as the coffee-table book; they are pleasanter to browse in than a subject encyclopaedia; and, unlike identification guides, they are topic-oriented. For the child who is carrying out a school project in natural history, or who has simply an awakened interest in the field, they possess an unparalleled quantity of information, presented accurately and with authority, but also with brevity. There are coloured photographs, full-page paintings, black and white illustrations, all designed to feed the imagination as well as to illustrate zoology. Small children, who may find the text too difficult, can enjoy the pictures. Adults can not only take pleasure in the books but can brush up, in not too much time and with no effort at all, on contemporary topics in the field.

Having said that much in praise, I must, unhappily, turn churlish, and wish that Natural Science of Canada, or more particularly Jack

McClelland, who is listed as publisher, had expended just a little more effort to turn out books that could be regarded, without reservation, as models of their type. There are several annoying lapses: a transposition of captions in the *Birds* volume labels a gull a knot, a knot a gull, and generally spreads confusion as well as suspicion as to the accuracy of less easily checked information. The captions for the introductory photographs, grouped in all three books on page six, refer to unnumbered pages, requiring the reader to do considerable leafing backwards and forwards to arrive at positive identification. Similarly, in the drawing of types of mammalian feet, the descriptive caption gives no key as to which is the rhinoceros', which the camel's foot. It is possible to figure it out, by a process of elimination, but the casual reader is more inclined to forget the whole business. A rather different weakness is evident in the drawings of the nursing platypus and opossum. These figures are identical, except for size and page placement, with those found in the Life Nature Library volume, *The Mammals*, published eleven years earlier. Perhaps there is one archetypal illustration from which both derive; but it would be better science to draw from the animals themselves, and better editing to avoid such duplication of material.

One is tempted to guess that the presence of such errors results from the absence of an overall editor responsible for the separate volumes. There are two eminent scientific consultants for the series, Walter Tovell and Murray Speirs; there is a managing director and an editor for Natural Science of Canada; and there are several authors, each writing a signed chapter, for the individual books. Somewhere there must be a volume co-ordinator, but his name is not mentioned, and his authority is, it would seem, limited. Illustrations do indeed relate to text, but every so often the impression arises that no one looked at the finished lay-out and said (with authority): "There's something wrong here. It's got to be changed" - as in the *Fish* book, to give one final example, where on one page the text states that air bladders evolved into lungs, while the picture caption says that air bladders developed *from* a primitive lung.

The text itself is excellent. The authors combine sound journalistic writing with scientific acumen; their styles are exceedingly alike, and trying to decide which of them is responsible for a given paragraph is a difficult undertaking. There is a certain overlapping of material, particularly between the general introductory chapter and the more specific ones that follow, but never to an objectionable degree, and the browsing possibilities of the book are probably increased by its presence. In each book, the first chapter deals with generalities; subsequent ones with special aspects of the topic. In all cases, there is a chapter on evolutionary development and on present-day conservation needs. No special knowledge of the subject or of zoology is presupposed, but scientific terminology is used throughout and parts can be highly technical. A child reader may find some parts beyond his reading ability; there is no reason he cannot take what he needs from the more general areas and leave the rest. Indeed, this would seem an excellent situation for introducing the use of a reference book: consulting a table of contents or an

index, referring to the various charts, reading limited sections of the text to find out what you want to know, as opposed to sitting down to read a book from beginning to end, as all children learn from Grade I on. It should be noted that *The Nature of Fish* is (inevitably) more abstruse than are the others. Only the scientist, and he only in recent years, has abandoned the air he shares with most other mammals and with birds, to penetrate the domain of the fish and to record their ways.

On the front cover of *The Nature of Mammals* is the portrait of a deer mouse; the corresponding volume in the similar Life Nature Library series has a lion on the cover. The contrast demonstrates several highly interesting aspects of the book, especially with regard to child readers. In the first place, the deer mouse is a Canadian mammal, one we may all expect to see if we keep our eyes open - and know something of its ways. Although the fact is never stated, all the photographs appear to be of Canadian mammals (and of Canadian birds in the relevant volume). Drawings, and text, cover developments over the world; the coelacanth, a truly unique fish, merits a full-colour photo, but basically these are Canadian books, dealing primarily with Canadian material and problems. Without being unduly nationalistic, that means easier comprehension for a Canadian child. The point of view is one he shares, and one that is clearly focussed for him. Also, since the conclusions are patently based on real observation, and since the environments are those he himself shares, the introduction to scientific method is entirely sound. The mouse, to a scientist, is interesting in its own right; its intrinsic value equals that of a lion.

The lion, on the other hand, shares with the elephant the leading role in that bestiary of exotic beasts to which all children are exposed from the age of two on. There is Tom Kitten, Curious George, Stuart Little, and dozens of others including, most pertinently, Louise Fatio's Happy Lion. For the most part, these combine the bodies of real animals, more or less, with the spirits of real children. Nonetheless, there is no genuine distinction between them and those inhabiting totally imaginary bodies: the Dragons of Blueland, or the unicorn at the bottom of the garden, or those more human species, Moomintrolls and Hobbits. They are all mythological beasties, of which some few also appear in somewhat similar form in the natural world. What can be difficult for a child is making the distinction between Peter Rabbit and the wild one in the back yard, who does not think like a child any more than he wears little blue coats with brass buttons. When adults share the confusion between fantasy and fact, the situation becomes totally absurd. *A Bear Named Paddington* appears on at least one book list under Natural Science, though no bear even roughly possessing his remarkable attributes has been seen in London *or* Peru. There is nothing at all wrong with fantasy and imaginary animals; what is essential is that the distinction be kept clear between the natural world and the imaginary, between the lion hunting on the African grasslands and the mythological kind that Androcles met long ago.

Fictional animals do not behave as real ones do; moreover, humans, child or adult, bear no responsibility toward them. They may enjoy their adventures and possibly benefit from the moral of the story, should

there be one. They may marvel at stories of tigers and monkeys in far-away lands, but these do not influence the readers' behaviour toward animals or birds actually round them. The traditional approach is summed up in the words of the Psalmist: "Thou hast made man a little lower than the angels . . . thou hast put all things under his feet; all sheep and oxen, yea and the beast of the field; the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea". Man was superior to all animals, but the responsibility for the entire set-up was the Lord's. The lesson told in the *Natural Histories* is a different and more sombre one: "The creatures of nature are rare treasures. Each is different. If they vanish, we will never see their like on earth again. And if we let this happen, knowingly, . . . it will be a particularly wicked form of murder, and an even worse form of arrogance" (*Mammals,* 142). The world has become a complex, fascinating ecosystem, where man has his niche, but where he also has the potential for damaging the system in ways he does not understand or cannot afterwards repair. In this generation we have on the whole turned away from the children's books that preached, sometimes at improbable levels, the glories of courage and loyalty, honesty and virtue among humans. The new moral, repeated here in each volume, is that man must take responsibility for the world he lives in; that no one, man or child, can forget that responsibility. Scientific observation and moral lesson combined make a new sort of book, one that is beyond doubt necessary in the contemporary world. Children (and adults) must not only learn how the natural world operates; they *must* realize that its accidental destruction is quite possible, and that for the terrifying consequences we would be ourselves to blame. We have a finite world, and many of its wonders are not renewable.

It is to be noted that there are remarkably few other books of a similar nature. There are excellent descriptive guides to all three fields, birds, mammals and fish (witness A.W.F. Banfield's *The Mammals of Canaaa),* but almost no topic-oriented, up-to-date, general audience publications in book form. Altogether there are 12 volumes in the Illustrated Natural History series; the other nine deal with geographic areas. In 1977, Natural Science of Canada intends to publish a 16-volume series, Canada's Illustrated Heritage, dealing with social history.

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