

MINI-REVIEWS

From sidewalk to seashore, Linda R. White and Janice Jellicoe. Illus. Renata Koreman. Calligraphy by Gail McEwan. The Federation of British Columbia Naturalists, 1984. 124 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-9691633-0-4.

This attractive book is full of good things. It describes animal and plant life in backyards, forests, streams, ponds and the seashore. There are clear, interesting keys for identifying birds, insects (including "insect monsters"), seeds and trees. The section on "reading animal stories" presents a good investigative approach to natural history. Some of the many valuable sections deal with snail trails, ways of trapping insects, and practical hints on equipment to make. The book is ring-bound, so that it may be readily opened and folded back during field trips. The clear drawings and explanations are well suited for children (ten years and older). Though it is "limited" to the west coast of British Columbia, many of the creatures described are found in other parts of Canada. Similar books for the rest of the country would be most welcome.

Night and Day, Catherine Ripley. Illus. Debi Perna and Brenda Clark (Consultant, Mike Singleton, Biologist, Federation of Ontario Naturalists). An Owl Magazine/Golden Press Book, 1985. Unpaginated. \$2.00 paper. ISBN 0-920775-00-4. (U.S. ISBN 0-307-11930-0, 0-307-61931-1.

This little book covers a full day, from dawn to dawn, in a setting of forest, field and pond. The different creatures keep busy mainly searching for food and avoiding being eaten themselves. The colored illustrations are attractive and the text clear and simple. Although the book follows the general rule in many nature studies that any little creature on which attention is really focussed escapes predators, the treatment is not generally sentimental. An attractive, and reasonably-priced look at nature for children up to 10.

Red pines on the ridge, Leon E. Pavlick. Illus. Lissa Calvert. Braemar Books, 1985. 35 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-919749-07-0.

The author is, by profession, a botanist at the British Columbia Provincial Museum. The book, which is beautifully illustrated, deals with a tree's life (300 years) as told by the tree itself. The tree recounts the history of its ridge, of the people that pass or live nearby over the centuries, and of the animals and other neighboring trees. The reader is given a good account of the overall biology and ecology of the tree and its setting. The style is

oratorical and lacking in humor, but perhaps trees do speak in this way. There is much valuable and interesting information, for good readers, ten and higher.

Nature puzzles, Pauline Philp. Illus. Patrice Clarkson. Scholastic-Tab, 1985. 70 pp. \$1.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-71508-9.

This is, mainly, a group of word puzzles: crosswords, "caboose puzzles," missing letters and others. Most of the words to be found come from the world of nature: animals, plants, seasons. The book provides a pleasant way for children (about 10 years) to increase their scientific vocabulary.

The secret code of DNA, Mary Razzell. Illus. J.O. Pennanen. Penumbra Press, 1986. Unpaginated. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-920806-83-X.

"DNA" is such an important term these days that a book which explains its significance, accurately, for children under ten would have been welcome. This is a difficult task which, unfortunately, this book does not accomplish. It is true, as the book says, that DNA is the substance that guarantees genetic stability of different species, but the explanation of its action is misleading. The "genetic code" is usually thought of as the triple base sequences in DNA's that eventually specify individual amino acids in proteins. So, to say that "there is a secret code written in sentences called genes on a special tape called DNA" can lead to confusion later when a child learns more about the way DNA really acts. Even at the level of the book there are some serious errors: on one design of the double helix, the design could be interpreted to mean that hydrogen bonds specify the genetic code, which they certainly don't. The statement that "all of us can improve on what our own DNA code says," could be interpreted by some readers to mean that nutritional and environmental conditions cause genetic changes; in the context of the book, the author presumably means that such conditions will affect the way genes are expressed, not at all the same thing. I found the pictures unattractive. Drs. Watson and Crick in the book bear little resemblance to their photographs. The price seems very high in comparison with other children's books.

Donn Kushner is a Professor of Biology at the University of Ottawa. In addition to scientific papers on bacterial physiology he has published a book of short stories "The witnesses and other stories" (1980) and two books for children "The violin maker's gift" (1980) and "Uncle Jacob's ghost story" (1984) which have been translated into several languages. His most recent book, *A book dragon*, is reviewed on page 68 of this issue.