

FIELD WORK

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Nature Quizzes for Canadians. Vicky McMillan. Illus. by Bill McMillan. J. J. Douglas, 1976. 144 pp. \$3.95 paper.

Wild Flowers of Eastern Canada: Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Provinces, Katherine Mackenzie. Illus. by Katherine Mackenzie. Tundra Books and Collins Publishers, 1973. Unpaginated, \$2.95.

Natural history is considered a rather quaint endeavour, an archaic branch of science concerned only with naming and observing things. It is also a generalist's field, left to the amateurs in an era of scientific specialists. But if natural history is no longer the pioneering study it was in the days of the great nineteenth century taxonomists, it remains a pleasurable pastime for many non-scientists. It is also where children begin to learn about their world. Like Douglas and Audubon before them, children are in a new and unexplored territory, and they want to observe and name the living things around them.

Nature Quizzes for Canadians is not exactly a book for children. It is a book for adults to use with children. There are thirty-five quizzes on a variety of topics, from the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) to the Boreal Forest and Insect Habitats. Many of these quizzes will stump reasonably-informed adults; and I doubt many children would be amused by taxing questions on the winter range of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Each quiz starts off with questions that most people could answer, and then rapidly escalates in difficulty to a level appropriate for experienced naturalists or professional scientists. Nonetheless, all the facts in this book are fascinating, and, used judiciously, they should surprise children into wanting to observe their environment more carefully.

The authors of *Nature Quizzes for Canadians*, Vicky and Bill McMillan, are both scientists. Their quizzes began as a private entertainment, a way of passing the time on long drives, and of making their experience of a place more vivid and specific. The McMillans realized how much they learned from this habit of questioning each other, and decided that it merited a book.

It seems that their quizzes in fact deserve several books. With such an enormous range — trees, wildflowers, birds, mammals, insects, seacoasts, weather — *Nature Quizzes* seems a little like an introductory offer, a prelude to a whole series of books on various regions and topics. It's not that the book is in any way superficial. But each quiz discloses such wonderful information that one wants more.

One of the most interesting (and chastening) quizzes deals with the natur-

al history of the city. I was chagrined to realize how little I knew about the plants and animals around me. I wasn't sure of the winter plumage of the starling. I didn't know the name of a plant found commonly in sidewalk cracks. I had never noticed whether houseflies have one or two pairs of wings.

Nature study is as much about acquiring a certain frame of mind, as it is about acquiring information. Being systematically attentive to one's surroundings is something that children have to be taught: it's a skill, not a gift. *Nature Quizzes* should prove an excellent tool for developing this kind of attentiveness in young people.

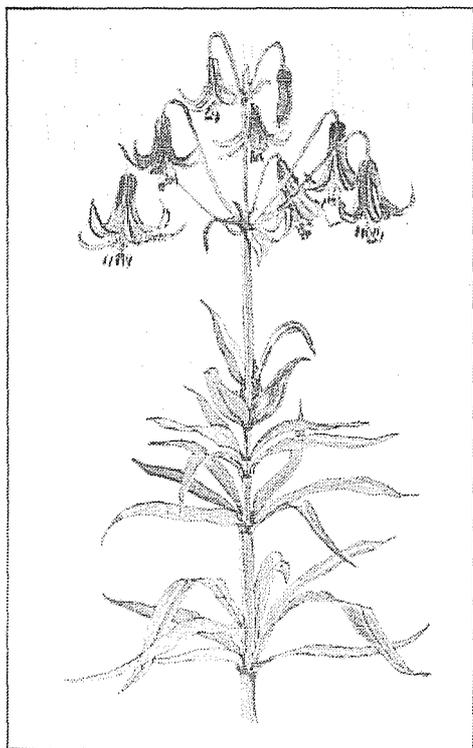
Katherine Mackenzie's *Wild Flowers of Eastern Canada* is a beginner's book, rather than a children's book. It is a simple field guide that organizes entries by flowering time, rather than by family or flower colour. The description of each plant is non-technical, but conveys enough so that identification should be quite easy. Mackenzie is neither a botanist nor an artist. She began making watercolours of wild flowers because she found pressing specimens so unsatisfying a way of recording her collections. The paintings were done for their own sake, without any thought of publication, and that they are not the work of a professional botanical artist is evident. By comparison with hand-painted plates in other flower guides — for example, Dagny Tande Lid's beautiful work in *Rocky Mountain Wildflowers* — Mackenzie's illustrations seem hesitant. The best flower illustrations are stiff and formal. (See Figure 1.) The flower is flattened and spread so that all of its features are apparent. Mackenzie may well argue that her more delicate and artful paintings are quite adequate for purposes of identification, and since she has chosen only the most common wild flowers, this is probably true. However, it can be very frustrating not to know the number of stamens, or the shape of a pistil or the exact arrangement of leaves, for such details are often critical in the correct identification of a species or subspecies. As a book for beginners, however, Mackenzie's guide is successful in the most important area: it conveys a genuine affection for its subjects. To my taste, perhaps too many flowers are described as "lovely", "delicate" and "beautiful". Their appeal should be made evident, without resort to uninformative adjectives.

Tundra, the publishers of Mackenzie's guide, have, as always, done a wonderful job of design and layout. The book is small — 4½ inches by 5½ inches — but the pages never look cramped. It is, quite literally, a pocket book, and is just the right size for a parka pocket, as a test with various outdoor garments revealed. Comparison with plates in other guides shows that the colours in Mackenzie's illustrations are quite faithful. Unfortunately, there is no scale given for the illustrations; out in the field, this omission could prove troublesome.

It is not entirely clear whether Tundra intended this book as a serious field guide. There are, in general, two types of flower books. One is meant for stashing in pack or pocket, to use in the field. The other type, usually very lavish, is meant for at-home reference and plain reading pleasure. Mackenzie's

book is very pleasing, but it is hardly a reference tool on the scale of, for example, Lewis Clark's *Wild Flowers of British Columbia*. However, as a field book, it does lack certain key information, and it seems rather too pretty and fragile to withstand the rough treatment that field guides invariably receive.

But these objections are not necessarily of concern to the beginner. As a first book for Easterners on local flowers, Mackenzie's guide should serve very well.



55 Canada Lily
Lilium canadense

The Canada Lily grows from two to five feet tall in wet fields, ditches and along railway tracks, and blooms from the end of June until August. The nodding bells are usually yellow, but can also be orange or red, with brown spots. A very striking and handsome wild flower.

Figure 1

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