9-1999

Review of Swallow Summer

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Abstract
The field season of 1995 (early May through late July) in western Nebraska is described in this book by the leading expert on cliff swallow (Petrochelidon pyrrhonota) behavior. This nontechnical introduction to the natural history of a colonial swallow was written for those who are interested in natural history or how field work is done. Brown's stated goals are to describe the challenges and satisfaction of long-term field work and to "tell the cliff swallow's story" (p xi). The book reads as part field notes (daily weather conditions, how many birds he caught and where), part personal diary (what frustrations with which assistant he experienced each day), and part historical account of his decade-and-a-half of research on cliff swallows.

Disciplines
Ornithology | Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecology | Zoology

Comments
This review is from *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 74 (1999): 337. Posted with permission.

Review
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Review by: Carol M. Vleck
Source: *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (Sep., 1999), p. 337
Published by: The University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2664642
Accessed: 24-05-2016 19:53 UTC

fungi as nature's recyclers, and plant and animal diseases caused by fungi to the practical as well as recreational uses of fungi. The chapter, Medicinal Molds, not only recounts the story of penicillin, but also includes ancient and modern discoveries of medicinal uses of fungi by various ethnic cultures. The stories of ethnomycology are continued in the chapters on baking and brewing, edible and poisonous mushrooms, and hallucinogenic mushrooms. I was especially pleased to see a chapter on the marvelously varied symbioses between fungi and insects. These stories clearly illustrate the interconnected web of life on which we all depend.

Magical Mushrooms, Mischievous Molds should be on the bookshelf of every instructor of general biology and mycology. This excellent resource clearly relates the importance of basic science to the practical world. These are stories that should be told to both scientists and laics. My only criticism is that the intriguing and imaginative book title is not followed by similarly imaginative chapter titles.

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SWALLOW SUMMER.

By Charles R Brown. Lincoln (Nebraska): University of Nebraska Press. $16.95 (paper). xiii + 371 p + 24 pl; ill.; index. ISBN: 0-8032-6145-4. 1998.

The field season of 1995 (early May through late July) in western Nebraska is described in this book by the leading expert on cliff swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) behavior. This nontechnical introduction to the natural history of a colonial swallow was written for those who are interested in natural history or how field work is done. Brown's stated goals are to describe the challenges and satisfaction of long-term field work and to "tell the cliff swallow's story" (p xi). The book reads as part field notes (daily weather conditions, how many birds he caught and where), part personal diary (what frustrations with which assistant he experienced each day), and part historical account of his decade-and-a-half of research on cliff swallows.

The main goal of this research has been understanding the significance of the variability in colony size. Cliff swallows can nest in colonies ranging in size from just a few birds to many hundreds. Brown's evolving understanding of the ramifications of colony size on foraging success, predator defense, ectoparasite load, brood parasitism, and attractiveness to nonbreeders is revealed as the book progresses, through insights gained from this particular season and through flashbacks to previous work. I came away with an appreciation of the effort and appeal of field work and a great deal more knowledge about cliff swallows, although the tidbits of natural history are interspersed with a rather gossipy account of daily life at the Cedar Point Biological Station. This book contains neither concrete data analysis nor references. Anyone who is looking for a more quantitative or formal description of Brown's cliff swallow research should look in the primary literature or in the Browns' book, *Coloniality in the Cliff Swallow: The Effect of Group Size on Social Behavior* (1996. Chicago (IL): University of Chicago Press).

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PALEONTOLOGY

NIGHT COMES TO THE CRETACEOUS: DINOSAUR EXTINCTION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF MODERN GEOLOGY.

By James Lawrence Powell. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company. $22.95. xvi + 250 p; ill.; index. ISBN: 0-7167-3117-7. 1998.

Among the welter of whodunits explaining the extinctions (including the dinosaurs) at the Cretaceous/Tertiary (K/T) boundary 65 million years ago, this volume is clearly the best. The prose is spare, yet lucid, and the book is beautifully written. The author is a geologist, and thus is trained to competently evaluate the data. He has no vested professional interest in the conclusion that he reaches. For this reason, the book never has the self-serving quality that occasionally creeps into other works by primary researchers in the field. The book is designed for general readers, and both laics and professionals will find much of value here.

The goal of *Night Comes to the Cretaceous* is twofold. Although the book contains a fine explication of the theory of an asteroid impact causing the K/T extinctions (the Alvarez hypothesis), it also seeks to formalize the idea that this hypothesis catalyzed a revolution in the earth sciences that is as profound as the plate tectonics revolution of the mid-1960s. It is clearly Powell's professional conclusion that the Alvarez hypothesis is correct. Thus, the balance of the book is devoted to the development of the argument that the K/T extinctions were caused by an asteroid. These arguments are presented in the manner that a scientist might ponder the problem (i.e., tests and predictions), and general readers will be able to understand the logic of a particular type of scientific conclusion. Although the goal is to present the reasoning, much of the history of the controversy is also revealed. Powell provides the various viewpoints expressed by the original researchers by quoting the primary literature. This lends consider-