

ESKIMO CURLEW. A VANISHING SPECIES? By J.B. GALLOP, T.W. BARRY and E.H. IVERSEN. Regina: Saskatchewan Natural History Society, 1986. 160 p. Maps, illus., tables, photos, bib. Softbound. Cdn\$9.00.

This book, the latest in the special publication series of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, is an attempt to compile the history and biology of the Eskimo Curlew, *Numenius borealis*, largely in the words of the people who were its contemporaries. This historical approach is one of necessity because, like an increasing number of species today, this bird was brought to the edge of extinction about 100 years ago by the thoughtless actions of people. Despite this limitation, however, the authors have done an excellent job of providing not only a valuable historical record, but also the focal point through which present conservation efforts can be directed to save this extremely rare species.

The major part of the text deals with the Eskimo Curlew geographically, beginning with the arctic breeding grounds and followed by fall, winter and spring accounts corresponding to the bird's movements between North and South America. When information is available for any locale, the authors give: (1) an estimate of the number of museum specimens that have existed, (2) a statement of status based on a review of the literature when the species was abundant (1870-90), (3) a listing of all dates found, (4) quotations that relate information on numbers, habitat, behaviour, voice, food, hunting, etc., and (5) a listing of place names reported in the literature but not mentioned in the text. In producing this synthesis, the authors have consulted some 600 papers and have had to make decisions concerning the authenticity of accounts and reliability of identifications. They readily admit that some records used were probably of misidentified Whimbrels, *N. phaeopus*, but also state that their liberal use of sightings gives them no more validity than when they were originally reported.

The remainder of the book is organized into brief sections, including a dedication (to the memory of R.R. MacFarlane, responsible for providing much of what we know about Eskimo Curlew breeding), a foreword (by C.S. Houston), glimpses of the bird (seasonal quotations), acknowledgements (manifold), an introduction, current status (sightings, 1945-85), field identification (compared with the similar Whimbrel and Little Curlew, *N. minutus*), a list of other scientific and common names for the bird, its life history briefly stated and an account of two nest searches for Eskimo Curlews a century apart (the former being MacFarlane's work, the latter the recent efforts of the Canadian Wildlife Service). Five appendixes precede the extensive bibliography.

Overall, the book is extremely interesting to read, both from ecological and historical perspectives. It is clearly written and thoughtfully laid out. The excellent illustrations by A.R. Smith and the photographs of birds and their habitats complement the text. Very few errors were found: Figure 6 appears to be wrongly labelled — the front views of Little Curlew, Eskimo Curlew and Whimbrel should read Eskimo Curlew, Little Curlew and Whimbrel. Maps 5 and 6 are out of order with respect to their page numbers and should be maps 1 and 2. The book lacks an index, and its value as a source of reference may have been increased with the inclusion of one. These are minor quibbles, however, and I strongly recommend the book to anyone with an interest in conservation issues. At Cdn\$9.00 it is excellent value for money.

In his foreword, C.S. Houston asks why the Eskimo Curlew has received so little attention. In contrast to other Canadian endangered species, virtually no money has been spent to study or protect the bird. Could it be, as Houston notes, because its extinction has been treated as a foregone conclusion? Fortunately, numerous recent sightings show that this has not happened yet. The authors of this book have gained our attention; it is now up to us.

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STEF: A BIOGRAPHY OF VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON, CANADIAN ARCTIC EXPLORER. By WILLIAM R. HUNT. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986. 334 p. Notes, bib., index, maps, illus. Hardbound. Cdn\$29.95.

This book is a measure of the fascination Vilhjalmur Stefansson holds as a prophet and controversial figure in arctic exploration. Public controversy and his voluminous writing (indicated in the bibliography) make it difficult to chronicle and explain his very full life and influence. By and large this is a sympathetic treatment of Stefansson and his accomplishments throughout the full range of his life.

Initially Hunt discusses the nature of the explorer/publicist of the period: the desire to reach certain goals as well as desire for public recognition that characterized these men. Driven by passion, ruthless and tenacious, courageous and egotistical, these adventurers captured public imagination. This concept is a key to understanding Stefansson. Interestingly, the study shows how his life intertwined with so many other explorers — Peary, Amundsen, Shackleton, Macmillan, Wilkins and Canadians Bartlett, Camsell, Finnie and Fitzgerald.

Ideas interested Canadian-born, American-educated Stefansson. This was evident at university, including Harvard, where he was a theological student who studied anthropology. Even then he loved public debate; later he found lecturing attractive. After his active life as an explorer, Stefansson's writing and advocacy of northern development reflected his passion for ideas. He was determined to overcome adversity — in schooling or controversy of negative publicity.

After studying diet in ancestral Iceland, in the tradition of shoestring budgets he came to the Canadian Arctic as a researcher in a joint Danish-American expedition. Following the pioneer anthropological method of Boaz, Stefansson spent time learning the Inuit language as well as following Inuit hunters to record techniques and lifestyle. At this time he heard about Victoria Island natives who looked like Europeans.

His imagination fired, when the expedition ended, he quickly organized another with his biologist friend Rudolph Anderson. Initially he continued to perfect his hunting and linguistic abilities, while making perceptive observations on Inuit life, including the negative impact of European traders and missionaries. Alone he travelled east and, by contacts with other natives, eventually in 1910 met the "Blond Eskimo," who were surprised at his ability to survive. Though Hunt suggests his book *My Life With the Eskimo* downplayed his speculation that they were descendants of the lost Greenlanders, fanned by journalists this embroiled him in a controversy that haunted him thereafter. The experience also demonstrated his faith in adapting, something rejected by other explorers and missionaries. And it created the publicity and the public recognition he sought.

Eight months after returning, he organized the government-backed Canadian Arctic Expedition. This was his single command of a large expedition. Increasingly his personal interest shifted from ethnology to classical geographic discovery. Hunt outlines an expedition beset with difficulties. The *Karluk*, a refitted but questionable whaler holding supplies of the Northern Party exploring sea and ice, got locked in and drifted to Siberia, where many scientists were lost despite a heroic rescue by Captain Bartlett. Stefansson's absence hunting contributed to the controversy. This exacerbated already poor relations with Anderson and Geological Survey scientists when as leader he requested supplies. As Diubaldo more fully pointed out, Ottawa officials were never fully reconciled to Stefansson's leadership and plans. Hunt discusses both the *Karluk* affair and charges of desertion or inadequate preparation, and the quarrels with the Southern Party, which Stefansson minimized. Other charges were systematically dealt with in a chapter entitled "Gossip." In this the study is sympathetic to Stefansson.

Nonetheless Stefansson managed to conduct extensive oceanographic studies with the faithful Storkerson. Additionally, using his travelling skills, he managed to discover lands. Hardship, illness and near starvation coupled with his triumphant demonstration of the ability to live off the land sparked public interest.