

1997

Book Review - Okoboji Wetlands. A Lesson in Natural History

Robert W. Black
Cornell College

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Recommended Citation

Black, Robert W. (1997) "Book Review - Okoboji Wetlands. A Lesson in Natural History," *Journal of the Iowa Academy of Science: JIAS*, 104(2), 52-52.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/jias/vol104/iss2/9>

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REVIEW

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Okoboji Wetlands. A Lesson in Natural History. Michael J. Lannoo. 1996. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, IA. xiv + 157 pp. ISBN 0-87745-533-3. \$29.95 hdbd., 14.95 pbk.

Michael Lannoo's reverent, musing history of the Okoboji region, and especially its wetlands and the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, is a uniquely structured, well-written and wonderfully illustrated introduction to a distinct region in Iowa, a rich natural history of wetland organisms and a relatively unexplored branch of environmental ethics. Lannoo draws upon many years of experience in this region, as a student, researcher and teacher, and the wonderful resources of the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory and the Iowa Great Lakes Maritime Museum to produce a volume that educates the reader of the history and natural history of the Okoboji region and provokes serious thought about ethically important aspects of environmental management. Lannoo clearly is a man who has a deep love of natural systems, organisms, and education, and he invites the reader to join him on his mission to change the way in which we appreciate and manage wetlands.

This book is creatively organized into a series of related chapters, beginning with "An Introduction to Wetlands" in which Lannoo defines wetlands and distinguishes them from lakes, presents important background information on both wetlands and the Okoboji region, and calls for the development of a wetland ethic modeled somewhat after Leopold's famous land ethic. Subsequent chapters combine Lannoo's writing with essays by past and present students and teachers at the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory to inform the reader of the "Origin" and history of the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, the "Historical Fauna" of the Okoboji region, the current "Wetland Fauna" of the region, and "Wildlife Management" practices in the area. Lannoo is very knowledgeable about the history and natural history of this area and could have produced tighter, more informative chapters on this ma-

terial without incorporating the writing of others. Lannoo's use of the work of others, however, provides interesting historical and personal perspectives on wetlands and wetland organisms that complement his own views and which ultimately lend strength to ethical stands he takes later in the book. Lannoo ends this book with a plea for the revaluing and restoration of wetlands both in general and especially in the Okoboji region. Although Lannoo makes no claim to be an environmental ethicist, he argues that wetlands and wetland organisms have values which have been unappreciated to date, and he strongly advocates changes in the wetland management practices used in the Okoboji region.

This text makes no attempt to provide a comprehensive treatment of the history, natural history, management or ethics associated with wetlands. Rather it attempts to weave the reader into the Okoboji wetland web and to engage the reader in the study, appreciation and preservation of wetlands. Lannoo makes very effective use both of the essays of others and of historical photographs provided courtesy of the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory and Steve Kennedy and the Iowa Great Lakes Maritime Museum; both bring an aesthetic and historical perspective to the book and add to the depth of the work. The drawings by Danette Pratt and the photographs of Carl Kurtz also enhance the impact of the book and make it easier for the reader to appreciate the great depth of feeling that Lannoo puts into his arguments on the value of wetlands and wetland organisms. Lannoo places special emphasis on the biology and value of amphibians in this work, but does not limit his treatment to this group. Indeed, this book includes very nice descriptions of zooplankton, snails, dragonflies, crayfish and birds as well as of frogs, salamanders and toads.

Okoboji Wetlands has a design and structure as unique as that of the ecosystems it describes and should be appreciated as such. This text should not be expected to stand alone as the definitive history of the Okoboji region, or as a comprehensive work on the natural history of wetlands in this area, or as the creator of a fully developed "wetland ethic" that can be used to make management decisions concerning wetlands. Instead, this text should be hailed for its attempt to show the connection between these seemingly disparate enterprises, and for its celebration of both the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory experience, Okoboji wetlands and the wonderful organisms they contain.—ROBERT W. BLACK, *Department of Biology, Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa 52314.*