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## REVIEW: Naturalist

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**Brijin Boddy**, Off the Shelf Co-editor, Chattahoochee Valley Libraries, [bboddy@cvrls.net](mailto:bboddy@cvrls.net)

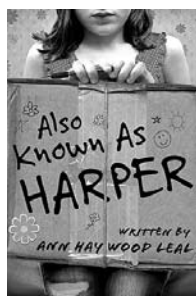
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### FICTION

**Also Known as Harper** by Ann Haywood Leal (Henry Holt and Company, 2009; ISBN 978-0-8050-8881-6, \$16.99)

Have you ever been down on your luck and can't seem to get back on top? Well, that is exactly what has happened to fifth-grader Harper Lee Morgan. Since her father left, her mother has been struggling to pay the rent and put food on the table. Then, after a few missed rent payments, Harper and her family are now faced with the new realities of being homeless. The worst news for Harper comes when she must stay out of school to watch after her younger brother, Hemingway, missing the annual school poetry contest. Poetry has always been the one place where Harper can find solace and peace within her complicated life, and to miss the contest for the second year in a row is essentially devastating. To top it all off, Harper's schoolmate, neighbor and cruel archnemesis, Winnie Rae Early, makes it a daily ritual to squash Harper's hopes and dreams of a better situation for herself and her family. Leal's characters are detailed and emotionally intricate, forcing the reader to feel as if they are sharing in the same life struggles. Their trials and struggles of homelessness and rejection become your own. The antagonist of the novel is one readers will love to hate, with a Nurse Ratched-esque personality that will invoke



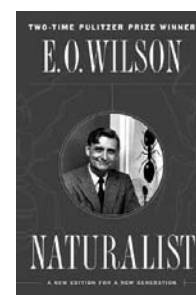
unfounded depths of anger within the reader's soul. However, in the end, it is delightful to see the family find strength in the written word: Harper's poetry or, more specifically, the great novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a character in which Harper is named after. Intended for readers ages 9-12, *Also Known as Harper* is a heart-warming and triumphant tale for every literature buff. ►►

— Reviewed by **Jennifer Green**  
Gwinnett County Public Library  
Snellville Branch

### NONFICTION

**Naturalist** by Edward O. Wilson (Island Press, 1994; ISBN 1-55963-288-7, \$30.00)

There are books that linger in the heart and mind yet languish on library bookshelves. They are neither new nor old but undeclared "classics" that deliver powerful story lines via eloquent, honest, easily accessible prose. It's good to be reminded of their existence and celebrate them again. Octogenarian Wilson's autobiography falls into this category. Names of outstanding scientists surface in the popular press every October like whales coming up for air when Nobel Prize winners are announced for chemistry, physics



and medicine/physiology. Then they promptly dive back into obscurity. What if you are the world's premiere evolutionary biologist and Alfred Nobel simply ignored or never envisioned your field? How does the public find out about you? Well, write an autobiography, preferably an award-winning one.

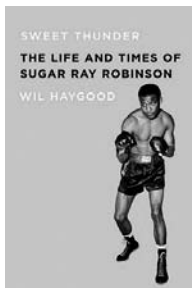
That is what the very shy Edward O. Wilson did by writing *Naturalist*. He is the Honorary Curator in Entomology at Harvard University and Pellegrino University Professor Emeritus there too. He is the winner of numerous science medals and two Pulitzer prizes in nonfiction literature. A childhood encounter with a pinfish cost him the sight of his right eye. It was pierced by a "needle like spine" from the flailing fish's dorsal fin. Here is how he describes the career choice made after this horrendous moment: "The attention of my surviving eye turned to the ground. I would thereafter celebrate the little things of the world, the animals that can be picked up between thumb and forefinger and brought close for inspection." (p. 15)

E.O. Wilson grew up in the American South. He was a lonely, curious child who sought the wild places in and near cities where his family lived, like Birmingham and Pensacola. Wilson studied the inhabitants of swamps and woodlands – especially ant colonies — with a doggedness that served him well as a field biologist in later life. A straight trajectory to Harvard and world renown as a myrmecologist (one who studies ants) seemed rather unlikely, yet he landed there and never left. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **JoEllen Broome**  
Zach S. Henderson Library  
Georgia Southern University

**Sweet Thunder: The Life and Times of Sugar Ray Robinson** by Wil Haygood (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009; ISBN 978-1-4000-4497-9, \$27.95)

Walker Smith Jr. was born in the rural south Georgia town of Ailey on May 3, 1921. His family moved to Detroit, then settled in Harlem where the teenage Walker was encouraged to participate in a Youth Boxing League. Entering and winning a league match at the last minute, under another boxer's name, he began fighting seriously. When a local sportswriter described him as a "sweet fighter" and nicknamed him "Sugar," Walker Smith Jr., age 16, became Sugar Ray Robinson and started his rise to the championship. Upon his death in 1989, Robinson's



statistics were impressive: 173 wins, 19 losses, six draws and multiple World Championships. His final legacy wasn't just in sports – he played jazz, danced and sang, and his friends were people who were changing the face of America – Lena Horne, Langston Hughes, Miles Davis, Joe Louis and Eleanor Roosevelt. His final legacy was his Youth Club – chartered in 1969, the Sugar Ray Robinson Youth Foundation provided programs for elementary and junior high school youth throughout the Los Angeles area. There were classes in ballet, drama, soccer, etiquette, fashion modeling. What wasn't taught was boxing; Robinson said he did not want to see children hitting each other.

The subtitle of *Sweet Thunder: The Life and Times of Sugar Ray Robinson* describes the book completely; for it is a biography of the man and the times he lived in, influenced and helped to change for the better. This is a biography not only for those who are interested in boxing, but also those who are interested in the social history of America in the 20th century and includes endnotes, source notes and a selected bibliography. Author Wil Haygood is an award-winning columnist for the Washington Post and has written two other biographies of notable African-American historical figures: *In Black and White: The Life of Sammy Davis Jr.* and *King of the Cats: The Life and Times of Adam Clayton Powell Jr.* Highly recommended for public libraries. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Dusty Gres**  
Director  
Ohoopee Regional Library System

**Carroll County, Georgia Pioneers: Sketches of Early Settlers of Carroll County, Georgia and Their Descendants Selected from Nineteenth-century Biographical Sources** compiled by Myron Wade House (Myron Wade House, 2009; ISBN 978-0-98255-830-0, \$47.95, hbk.)

Former University of West Georgia Archivist Myron House is a Carroll County, Ga., historian. This work represents one of his projected series of histories of the area and its early settlers. The subtitle tells you exactly what you get: a collection of biographies, straight out of 19th-century sources. This makes the compilation relatively easy to assemble; no editorial hand is needed or desired, which may seem like a simple project on the face of it, but House's knowledge of early settlers is what makes the work possible. Some biographies do not mention Carroll County at all, but House includes a note at the end of the sketch that indicates why that particular biography appears in this volume; it is because of the subject's