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Ephemeral by Nature: Exploring the Exceptional with a Tennessee Naturalist

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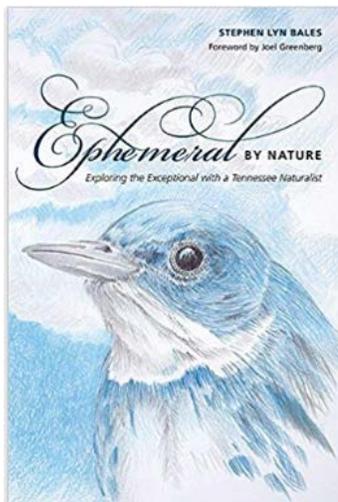
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The found correspondence revealed the Mentelles family life in France and their life in Kentucky is rich with emotion and purpose. Runyon helps us to see how a family learned to survive in a culture so different from their own. From the founding of a school to becoming valued citizens in Lexington, Kentucky, the Mentelles rose to being highly valued.

Highly recommended.

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D., MLIS
Librarian and Research Consultant

Ephemeral by Nature: Exploring the Exceptional with a Tennessee Naturalist. Stephen Lyn Bales. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-6219-0354-3 (pbk). 219 p. \$24.95.



Naturalist, artist and photographer, Stephen Lyn Bales, takes us on an exploratory ramble in this collection of essays highlighting 12 unique outdoor wonders. A senior naturalist at the Ijams Nature Center, in Knoxville, Tennessee, Bales draws on his field and research experience to relate the behavior and oddities of an array of plants, insects, fish, mammals and birds. Injecting a popular generality to his subjects, his use of anecdotes, timely quotes, and allusions to current events whets the appetite of readers to explore further.

Author of two previous natural histories - *Ghost Birds: Jim Tanner and the Quest for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, 1935-1941* and *Natural Histories: Stories from the Tennessee Valley* - Bales focuses on natural phenomenon in East Tennessee. Using an informal, conversational writing style leavened with humor, he profiles these natural marvels and illustrates their beauty with pen and ink drawings.

Each essay probes the significance and peculiarities of his subjects, including plants such as the elusive wildflower, jack-in-the-pulpit, and the evanescent ghost plant, colloquially known as corpse or ice plant. The insects - the southern pine beetle and the monarch butterfly - are respectively acknowledged for their voraciousness and beauty. Lessons learned about the decimation of pine forests leading to land renewal and the decline of a butterfly species due to a common pesticide inform our understanding of a complex ecosystem.

Two aquatic creatures, the freshwater jellyfish and the lake sturgeon, are spotlighted; the first, for its virtual transparency, except when it “blooms” en masse and the other, imperiled, but reintroduced into the Tennessee River Basin thanks to the efforts of aquatic conservationists in the state. Serious birders, as well as amateur bird-watchers, will appreciate the enlightening essays on the short-eared owl, the cerulean warbler, the ruby-throated hummingbird, and the whooping crane.

In an intriguing essay on the Appalachian panda, Bales writes that there are no pandas currently living in the wild in the U.S., but a tooth discovered at the Gray Fossil Site in East Tennessee, dating from the late Miocene period, links it to the smaller red pandas of Asia. Though Bristol’s Appalachian Panda was larger with a broader diet, visitors to the Knoxville Zoo will note it’s lineage in the Red Panda Village, where they are conducting a successful breeding program for this near extinct species.

The other mammal profiled is the coy-wolf-dog, representing the emergence of a hybrid canid, the outcome of three separate species: western coyotes, eastern wolves and dogs. Bales’ description of how this transpired is writing about evolutionary history in the making and is absolutely riveting.

Observing that life itself is ephemeral, and as the dramatist, Eugene Ionesco, wrote, “only the ephemeral is of lasting value,” Bales encourages us to discover and appreciate the fleeting natural wonders all around us. His enthusiasm for his subjects and free-ranging forays into related topics such as climate change and preservation of species, make this a book to sample and dip into at leisure.

Recommended for both public and academic libraries.

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