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Book Review - Tracking the Golden Isles: The Natural and Human Histories of the Georgia Coast

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Off the SHELF

Tracking the Golden Isles: The Natural and Human Histories of the Georgia Coast by Anthony J. Martin (University of Georgia Press, 2020: ISBN 9780820356969, \$32.95)

In his eighth published book, Dr. Anthony J. Martin, professor of practice in the Department of Environmental Sciences at Emory University, focuses his research on Georgia's coastline, specifically its Golden Isles. St. Simons Island, Little St. Simons Island, Sea Island, and Jekyll Island comprise these Isles, Georgia's four barrier islands located halfway between Savannah and Jacksonville. He also makes research stops on Tybee Island, Sapelo Island, Cumberland Island, and a few other coastal locales in Georgia. In *Tracking the Golden Isles*, Martin uses his knowledge as an ichnologist, one who studies trace fossils both in modern and past history, to explore traces of life on Georgia's barrier islands.

Trained at university as a geologist and paleontologist, Martin primarily focuses his research endeavors on ichnology, a field defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as "the branch of paleontology dealing with the study of fossilized footprints, tracks, burrows, or other traces as evidence of the activities of the organisms that produced them."

On the south end of Jekyll Island, Martin—assisted by his wife, Ruth—draws conclusions about the diet of sanderlings based on traces left in beach sand at low tide. This flat stretch of beach lends itself to the human discovery of

traces left behind by shorebirds, molluscs, and amphipods. Martin theorizes that a frenzy of sanderling foot tracks amidst a bed of empty dwarf surf clam shells points to a recent predatory scene: an avian feast of shallow buried bivalves.

Martin also reminisces about previous research trips in *Tracking*. He discusses finding racoon tracks on St. Catherines Island intertwined with those of a loggerhead turtle, indicating that the hungry racoon followed the mother turtle to her nest in order to feast. Racoons—as well as wild island hogs—ruthlessly consume turtle eggs, thus threatening the future of the loggerhead and diamondback terrapin species. Nearby, Wassaw Island has borne no evidence of hog traces and thrives as a nature reserve for nesting sea turtles and shorebirds. Once owned by freed slave Anthony Odingsell in the 19th century, Wassaw is now owned by the Nature Conservancy and managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

This book is suitable for academic libraries whose institutions offer biology, marine biology, and life sciences programs or environmental science and fish and wildlife management courses. Coastal Georgia bookstores and public libraries would also benefit from this title's addition.

Kristi Smith is Resource Description Librarian at Georgia Southern University

