

# *WILDLIFE SOUND*

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## Travelling the Dempster

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*A paperback by John Neville, published by Trafford Publishing Victoria BC, Canada*

### **Reviewed by Gordon Edgar**

Not content with audio CD's, our John continues to develop his skills and has produced a companion book about his recording expedition.

As already mentioned, I published an abridged account in the last issue. The book covers the same ground but the subject matter is more wide ranging and comprehensive. It is much more than a diary or log; it is a full-blown travelogue.

The primary purpose of the trip was to record the common bird songs *en route* and the book is written from a naturalist's perspective and geared towards our core interests.

Clearly, John is passionate about his subject and is very informative about the natural world. He covers a lot of ground and topics include the geography and geology, meteorology, the flora and fauna and the ecology of the changing vegetation zones they pass *en route*. The far north is evidently an interesting region and a far cry from the world we inhabit!

There is more to life than sound recording and human interest is not neglected. There are chapters on the native Gwitchen people, the early European explorers and of course, the prospectors and gamblers of the celebrated '1896 Goldrush'. Needless to say, the Klondike attracted plenty of colourful characters during the 'boomtown years' and their exploits are legendary. Believe it or not, Klondike Kate and the 'dangerous' Dan McGrew are household names on this side of the Atlantic!

The text hangs together well and the style is informal rather than scholastic. The book is easy reading and manages to inform and explain complex issues without being heavy or turgid. Clearly, the book has been well researched as corroborated by the extensive bibliography.

I am certainly better informed having read from cover to cover and I will pass on a few morsels of my new found insight. For example, I learned that the luminous greenish colours in an aurora are produced by ionized oxygen atoms, while the pink displays are derived from atoms of nitrogen. I expect all our accredited readers knew that already! Come to think of it, the dancing lights would make a good PC screen saver. Has anyone ever seen the like?

Moving on, I pass on a quotation from Bernie Krause in 'Wild Soundscapes' that is worth repeating. He divided 'natural' sounds into two categories, coining the term 'geophony' for the sounds of the Earth and its elements: wind, water, ice, earthquakes, volcanoes etc. In distinction, he labeled the sounds produced by living creatures, as 'Biophony', although this designation excluded noise generated by humans. Suggestions on a postcard, please!

Next, an esoteric question. John alluded to the 'clicking' tendons of the Caribou and that begs the question, "Is there a plausible explanation?" I ask because the same phenomenon occurs in the captive herd of Père David Deer at Woburn Park.

Clearly, this long journey to the far north as a memorable experience. After a walk in a pristine area of the Blackstone Valley, John wrote that he was moved by the tranquility and described his sense of wonder having the wilderness all around. He had

stopped checking his watch or listening to the news. He had relaxed into the rhythms of the natural world. Sounds like therapy! Happy days!

### **Conclusion**

Birdsong is a 'niche market' but this book will appeal to a wider audience and the style is right for the popular travelogue. I predict that it will find a ready market with the general public and future tourists to the region, in particular.

Undoubtedly, authoring this book was time well spent; surely a good career move that will take the 'Neville Recording' label to a new audience and new heights?

'Travelling the Dempster' is John's first foray into the literary world and I predict that it will not be the last. What will he do for an encore/

Mighty fine!

### **References**

Krause, Bernard L. Wild Soundscapes: discovering the Voice of the Natural World (book and CD), Berkley, Wilderness Press, 2002

Travelling the Dempster book and 2CD Bird Songs of the Arctic-Along the Dempster Highway available [www.nevillerecording.com](http://www.nevillerecording.com)

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