

US Fish & Wildlife Service
US Fish & Wildlife Publications

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Year 1994

H. Albert Hochbaum: A Man Not
Forgotten

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Book Reviews

H. ALBERT HOCHBAUM: A MAN NOT FORGOTTEN

Wings over the prairie. H. Albert Hochbaum, edited by George Hochbaum. 1994. Tamos Books Inc., Winnipeg, Manitoba. 116 pages. \$24.95 (cloth).

This book is a posthumous collection of essays by Al Hochbaum, compiled and edited by his son George, and is a unique blend of classic literary pose and artistry. It is colorfully illustrated with brilliant photographs by two of the best waterfowl photographers, Jack A. Barrie and Glen D. Chambers. Hochbaum's painting of a canvasback flight over Delta Marsh graces the frontispiece and several of his pen-and-ink sketches are scattered throughout. Both the foreword, by Gene Bossenmaier, and the introduction, by George Hochbaum, pay tribute to Hochbaum's dedication to waterfowl, his immense talents, and a lifetime of accomplishment. Hans Albert Hochbaum, known by many as "Man of the Marsh," died in March 1988.

The beginning essay, "My Prairie Home," equals as a geography and history lesson and sets the stage. It describes the grassland biomes of the United States and traces the advance of civilization in a way similar to John Madson's writings on the tall-grass prairie. Hochbaum characterizes the progress of early pioneers out of the eastern forests and onto the vast plains with a mission to "tame" the prairie, and how these events changed the prairie landscape forever. But, in spite of the wheat and barley or the overgrazed grasslands, Hochbaum denotes that the prairie's countless marshes remain as wild and pristine as in the days of the pioneers. He points out that "Great numbers of ducks that have lingered with us into the 20th century have done so largely because of the abundance and productivity of prairie marshes." He adds that wherever there is a marsh, no matter how domestic the prairies have become, there remains a bit of wilderness, a gem held over for us to enjoy.

Several essays dwell on the relationship between ducks and farming, the land, water, and the dilemma with predation. Each reflects Hochbaum's deep understanding of the needs of ducks, their instincts, and the ever changing imbalance in the scale for survival. He stresses that habitat management is the key to maintaining ducks, but also notes that we can not view habitat management in isolation from predation and hunting. I often remember him preaching that we should be cautious not to over-harvest our "capital stock," because in most years there are empty habitats and too few ducks returning each spring to use them. Other essays convey his keen observance of ducklings, their innate behavior and learned skills. His understanding of duck passes and established flight patterns between places is amazing. He addresses mating and courtship, the combat for a mate, and relates these truths to both the animal world and down through the ages to 20th-century man. In an essay I found particularly profound, Hochbaum compares the domestication of the mallard at the hand of man to man's dependency on governments. Just as

many wild mallards have become "fat, potbellied ducks of our farmyards" and our parks, so has man become more dependent upon government security in their individual lives. He writes that we have a choice; we can, "like the wild mallard, stake our future on our ability, as an individual and nationally, to meet all the hardships of life and come out on top. Or we can follow the domestic mallard and accept a safe, although artificial way of life, in which the present may be pleasant enough, but the freedom is limited and the future uncertain."

Other essays are equally profound. In "Wildlife and Science," Hochbaum discusses the value of science to society and to the management of wildlife. He cites public objection and political apathy as the great obstacles that we must overcome to advance our conservation programs. I recommend "The Wilderness" to anyone searching for the meaning of wilderness and seeking to understand its personal value. Hochbaum states that it is not the physical wilderness itself that man seeks "but the isolation that allows him to contemplate his goals and ideals ... and to communicate with something greater than himself." Without this, he implies that we do not prosper. The book ends as aptly as it began with "April Evening," an inspired writing depicting the first appearance of snow geese returning in spring, en route to their ancestral nesting grounds.

Being familiar with Hochbaum's earlier published books — *The Canvasback on a Prairie Marsh*, *Travels and Traditions of Waterfowl*, and *To Ride the Wind* — the publication of this book was a big surprise. I had no idea that these essays, some written in the 1940's, remained unpublished. Credit must go to George Hochbaum and others who persisted to produce this book. It is well organized with the right mixture of text, photographs, and Hochbaum's art work. This format best suits Hochbaum's writing style and captures his simple messages. Also, because the essays are short, I believe this book will have widespread appeal. Like his famed college professor and mentor, Aldo Leopold, Hochbaum's writings have a profound way of teaching classic lessons of life by writing about simple truths, food chains, the battle for survival, and what happens when this delicate balance is disrupted. He opens our eyes to the complex natural world around us. Without doubt, Leopold would be proud of Hochbaum's writings and his messages.

This book is neither highly technical nor just another pretty duck book; it offers the reader a unique perspective on life. I highly recommend this book to everyone. Hochbaum was a rare man, a man of the marsh. Thanks to those who made this book possible, H. Albert Hochbaum is a man not forgotten! — *Jerome R. Serie, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Laurel, MD 20708.*