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**Review of *Collecting the Natural World: Legal Requirements and Personal Liability for Collecting Plants, Animals, Rocks, Minerals and Fossils* by Donald Wolberg and Patsy Reinard**

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**Collecting the Natural World: Legal Requirements and Personal Liability for Collecting Plants, Animals, Rocks, Minerals and Fossils.** Donald Wolberg and Patsy Reinard. Tucson: Geosciences Press, 1997. iii+330 pp. \$24.00 paper (ISBN 0-945005-20-2).

*Collecting the Natural World* is, in the authors' words, an attempt to "provide a practical guideline to the maze of regulations and possible liabilities which confront the collector" of natural objects in the United States. To

achieve this lofty goal would require uncommon knowledge of multiple scientific disciplines, objectivity, and thorough research into myriad laws and regulations. Unfortunately, this work generally fails to meet its goal and suffers from a pervasive lack of objectivity.

Six paired chapters, the body of the book, review federal and state laws and agencies regulating collecting of three broad groups of natural objects: archeological; paleontological and geological; plants and animals. Nine appendices comprise more than half the book's space. Some are quite valuable ("Useful Addresses"), others appropriate (texts of several relevant federal laws), and some, though interesting, of no particular relevance to this work ("State Symbols, Fossils, Flora, and Fauna"). There is no index.

Much play (more than nine pages) is dedicated to an introduction to paleontological collecting, while archaeological collecting receives a scant three paragraphs, and plant and animal collecting not a single line. This disproportionate treatment does not reflect the relative complexity of laws and regulations applying to these fields, and such an arbitrary emphasis on paleontology does a disservice to those engaged in the others. After reading both chapters on plant and animal collecting, for example, one would not know that it is illegal to possess virtually any nongame bird, even a road-killed blue jay, without a federal permit. The Migratory Bird Act is mentioned only briefly in Appendix I, but "migratory bird" is not defined by the authors. This gives an amateur collector little guidance, leaving him or her particularly vulnerable.

In the introductory section on paleontological collecting, we meet with biased and distorted views on everything from the case of the *T. rex* "Sue" to a definition of "paleontologist" that includes commercial fossil hunters. Indeed, much in this section appears to be little more than a lobbying effort in favor of commercial access to public lands and a criticism of regulations attempting to preserve unique scientific resources held in public trust. In a four page discussion of three "pending" federal legislative initiatives, the authors accompany their subjective judgement of the relative merit of each bill with a list of the bill's "Findings," telling the reader nothing about the actual proposed regulations.

Scope and detail of coverage throughout the book are uneven. Under the state entry for Kansas, for instance, a state with only average federal land holdings, we are told that "many federal land agencies manage lands in Kansas," and "federal law as discussed elsewhere in this book should be consulted." Such an admonition for Nevada, however, a state where over 80 percent of the land is federally owned or administered, is lacking. We are informed that in Nevada, "as in Nebraska," gemstones are defined as com-

modities, but we are not given this information in the section on Nebraska. Such inconsistency undermines confidence. It would be wiser for collectors simply to follow the authors' own caveat in the preface—"Always check with appropriate authorities on the current state of the law"—and disregard succeeding chapters altogether.

Had the authors limited their book's scope to their field of expertise and resisted the temptation to editorialize at every turn, they could have made a far more valuable contribution. One gets the distinct feeling, however, that the book as published suits its authors' true goals precisely. **Gregory W. Brown**, *Vertebrate Paleontology*, *University of Nebraska State Museum*.