



Earth Almanac

Ted Williams

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“Writing about experiences afield is a way of reliving them,” environmental reporter Ted Williams writes in *Earth Almanac*, which synthesizes half a century of his nature observations into essays that mark the changing of the seasons, celebrating the diversity among flora and fauna that is revealed by careful attention.

Based on Williams’s long-running natural history column for *Audubon* magazine, the book accretes snippets on phenology and animal behavior. Creatures from common poorwills to turtles hibernate for the winter, but spring is on the way when one hears downy woodpeckers drumming and sees coltsfoot blooming. Summer is quieter but full of intoxicating smells, while fall is the favorite season in Williams’s New England household. The book’s attention moves between organisms great and small—from coyotes to skunk cabbage, and from gray whales to honeybees.

Williams’s expertise allows him to propose understandable explanations of birds’ vocalizations and courtship routines; of winter signs like tracks in the snow and dung; of how to get children interested in bugs; and of how to distinguish a jack-in-the-pulpit from a jill (the plants change sex back and forth based on the growing conditions).

The book includes recipes for sautéed fiddlehead ferns and wild grape jelly and craft projects like pinecone bird feeders and fire starters to create different colors of flame. Its educational functions at times outweigh the pleasures of its prose, but Williams’s optimism is infectious. Poetic quotations and John Burgoyne’s illustrations are inviting features.

Ideal as a coffee table or bedside book from which to read an entry or two a day to keep pace with the seasons’ unfolding, *Earth Almanac* is an enthusiastic guide for novice nature lovers.

REBECCA FOSTER (September / October 2020)

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