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While You Were Sleeping

John Butler
Peachtree Press (September 1999)
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This counting book has few words to mar Butler's exquisite illustrations. In the first book that he has both written and illustrated, Butler has chosen his words well, but the value of this book comes from the paintings that are so rich and lustrous that they speak of the beauty and harmony of nature much more than any words ever could.

Butler has illustrated many children's books, including Polar Star, Cimru the Seal and The Snow Leopard, since he began his career in 1976. All of his books have featured the environment or animals in their natural habitats, and it is obvious from this volume that Butler has a special gift for painting animals so lifelike that they seem more real than photographed animals. The eyes are deep and luminescent and the baby animals are particularly appealing. Four baby owls stare right into the eyes of the reader as if to say, "Oh, pick us up and take us home!" One can almost count the hairs on the three bear cubs frolicking in the snow.

As the book opens, Daisy, a child of about five, is just waking up. She asks her mother what the animals that were awake during the night were doing while she was sleeping. She learns that one tiger cub was hunting in the jungle, two mice were building a nest in the hay, five dolphins leapt out of the sea, six deer jumped over a silvery stream, seven geese flew past the moon, eight rabbits played in a misty meadow, nine elephants marched through the long grass and ten penguins jumped out of the icy sea to join 100 friends.

The last two pages of the book give children an additional exercise: to find the ten penguins (toy or illustrated) in Daisy's room. Also present are toy or illustrated animals in the same quantities as in the counting pages.

Butler's backgrounds are in muted tones that perfectly complement the animals. The scenes employ a variety of settings—dawn, dusk, day, night, summer, autumn, winter, spring, land, sea and air. All are pristine and beautiful.

Most appropriate for ages two to six, this book is sure to charm children and adults as it provides a warm and gentle way to begin or end the day together.

SHARON FLESHER (November / December 1999)

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