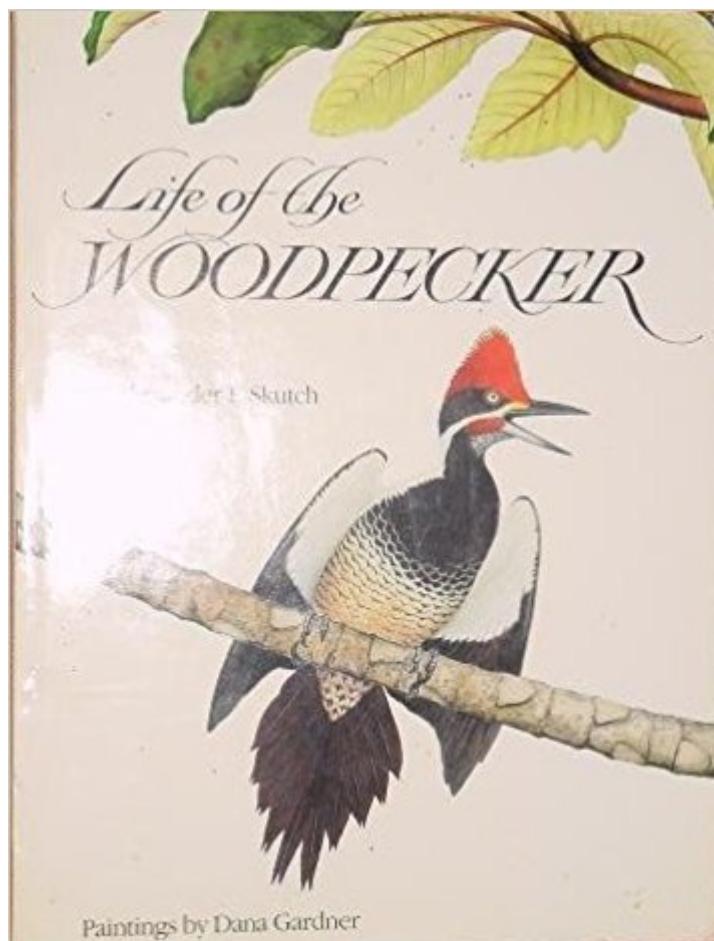


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Life Of The Woodpecker



Synopsis

Doctor Alexander Frank Skutch (1904-2004) was a naturalist and writer. He published numerous scientific papers and books about birds and several books on philosophy. He is best remembered ornithologically for his pioneering work on helpers at the nest, which is a term used in behavioural ecology and evolutionary biology to describe a social structure in which juveniles and sexually mature adolescents of either one or both sexes, remain in association with their parents and help them raise subsequent broods or litters, instead of dispersing and beginning to reproduce themselves. Alexander Skutch was born in Baltimore, Maryland. He received a Doctorate in Botany from Johns Hopkins University. Skutch wrote over 40 books and over 200 papers on ornithology, preferring a descriptive style and eschewing statistics and even banding. He died eight days before his 100th birthday, in the same year that he received the Loya and Alden Miller Research Award. He is universally regarded as one of the world's greatest ornithologists. The illustrator, Dana Gardner (b. 1950), grew up in a small village in Southeastern Minnesota which led to a lifelong interest in nature. He has illustrated many books on natural history subjects, and especially books and field guides on birds. He met Alexander Skutch in Panama in 1976 and they worked together for the next 28 years until his death. As always, his illustrations in "Life of the Woodpecker" are exquisite!

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Customer Reviews

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remembered ornithologically for his pioneering work on helpers at the nest, which is a term used in behavioural ecology and evolutionary biology to describe a social structure in which juveniles and sexually mature adolescents of either one or both sexes, remain in association with their parents and help them raise subsequent broods or litters, instead of dispersing and beginning to reproduce themselves. Alexander Skutch was born in Baltimore, Maryland. He received a Doctorate in Botany from Johns Hopkins University. Skutch wrote over 40 books and over 200 papers on ornithology, preferring a descriptive style and eschewing statistics and even banding. He died eight days before his 100th birthday, in the same year that he received the Loya and Alden Miller Research Award. He is universally regarded as one of the world's greatest ornithologists. The illustrator, Dana Gardner (b. 1950), grew up in a small village in Southeastern Minnesota which led to a lifelong interest in nature. He has illustrated many books on natural history subjects, and especially books and field guides on birds. He met Alexander Skutch in Panama in 1976 and they worked together for the next 28 years until his death. As always, his illustrations in "Life of the Woodpecker" are exquisite!

In his introduction to this work (one of a series, each volume covering a taxonomic family, or in some instances an assemblage formerly regarded as one family), S. Dillon Ripley observes that few ornithological writers "can match the style, comprehensiveness, and charm of Alexander F. Skutch" and that in this book "he once again succeeds in conveying intangibly, not only accurate scientific notes about activities of the woodpecker family, but also in a sense quite especially separate from those who would identify woodpeckers' habits with human customs and mores, the fact that woodpeckers are fascinating coinhabitants of this world". As Ripley then notes, Skutch was a "master at making such observations...in a thoroughly realistic and scientific way, but also with ineffable charm". Ripley is absolutely correct. Most of the other volumes in the series are devoted to families of birds exclusively (or almost exclusively) neotropical in distribution, but woodpeckers are much more cosmopolitan in distribution. Readers will find details and insights about the life histories of these birds written in Skutch's inimitable style (scientific, yet in many instances bordering on poetic). His mastery of language and his uncanny phrasing make any of his works a worthwhile read, and this is no exception.

This is a somewhat peculiar, coffee-table sized book. I'm not sure how to describe its genre. Popular science book doesn't entirely cut it. It seems to be some kind of "geek" book. Of course, you need to be a woodpecker-loving geek to appreciate it! It contains good color illustrations in the form of paintings by Dana Gardner. The text, by Alexander F Skutch, deals with

all aspects of woodpecker behavior. Ironically, "Life of the Woodpecker" is brought to us by the Ibis Publishing Company! The ibis is, ahem, a wading bird!

I hesitated getting this book because I couldn't find much written about it, but I wanted to find out more about the several species of woodpeckers that visit our backyard and the woods around us. I hit the jackpot with this book and recommend it highly for anyone who wants to learn more than the basics covered in bird guides. All the North American woodpeckers are covered and many more as well. The illustrations by Dana Gardner are breathtaking. You will find out how different species store their food, their dwellings and territories, daily life, how they communicate, pair formation, social life, and much more. This book is an enjoyable read and not at all like reading a textbook. If you want to learn more about woodpeckers get this book!

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