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BOOKS

Browsings**Rivers of America.**

Tim Palmer. Abrams, New York, 2006. 224 pp. \$40, C\$50, £24.95. ISBN 0-8109-5485-0.

Photographers have long been captivated by flowing water. Here Palmer, the author of several previous books on river conservation and specific rivers, offers a selection of scenes of unspoiled waterways from around the United States. Short essays sketch the impact rivers have had on his life, their importance to ecosystems, the threats they face (from dams and pollution to exotic species and riverside development), and steps being taken on their behalf. But the book is primarily a celebration of the visual aesthetics of rivers (right, the Tuolumne in the Sierra Nevada foothills).



CREDIT: TIM PALMER, FROM *AMERICAN RIVERS*/COURTESY ABRAMS, NEW YORK

Ogallala Blue.

Water and Life on the High Plains. William Ashworth. Norton, New York, 2006. 344 pp. \$26.95, C\$35.50. ISBN 0-393-05842-5.

To 19th-century explorers and surveyors, the High Plains, west of the 100th meridian, seemed the Great American Desert. Despite sufficient rainfall to

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make the region semiarid, they believed the shortgrass prairie worthless for farming. Today, the land accounts for over 20% of the U.S. agricultural output. Most of the water that fuels this harvest comes from the Ogallala Aquifer. Ashworth tells the story of this groundwater and the people it sustains. He discusses the origins of the fossil water and the sheet of erosional debris that contains it, extraction technologies (such as centrifugal pumps and center-pivot sprinklers), and the range of approaches to allocating, managing, and conserving the resource. Five trillion gallons are being withdrawn from the aquifer each year. Although draconian predictions of the Ogallala's fate have gone unrealized, Ashworth argues that the reprieve is likely only to be temporary.

Bird Coloration.

Geoffrey E. Hill and Kevin J. McGraw, Eds. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2006. Volume 1, Mechanisms and Measurements. 631 pp. \$95, £59.95, €87.50. ISBN 0-674-01893-1. Volume 2, Function and Evolution. 519 pp. \$95, £59.95, €87.50. ISBN 0-674-02176-2.

These two volumes offer students and researchers a wide-ranging account of how and why birds often display bold and brilliant colors. An initial section covers perception and measurement. Subsequent chapters discuss the pigments (e.g., melanins and carotenoids) and feather structures that produce colors. Next, contributors consider how genes, the environment, and hormones control color expression. In the second volume, the authors examine avian uses of color, including concealment, mate choice, and signaling. Two contributors review the selective pressures driving the evolution of avian colors and patterns. A final chapter describes an approach to reconstructing the coloration of ancestral avian lineages.



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