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NEWSLETTER

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Interest in Field Biology and Its History

A recent book by Michael J. Lannoo, *This Land is Your Land: The Story of Field Biology in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2018) recounts the history of American field biology from early nineteenth-century expeditions to roughly the mid-twentieth century. Lannoo argues that field biology is enjoying a resurgence today, which he attributes in part to scientific popularizations and partly to cultural associations or what he refers to as the "swag factor," meaning the popular notion that field biologists are charismatic adventurers in the mold of Indiana Jones. Adopting an anecdotal and episodic approach to his subject, Lannoo celebrates field biology and natural history as laying the foundations of ecology, wildlife biology, conservation biology, and restoration biology, although he does not seriously engage with the topic of restoration biology in this book.

He also makes an appeal for more histories of field biology and especially for more biographies of field biologists. There is new scholarship on this topic, for example Jeremy Vetter's book *Field Life: Science in the American West during the Railroad Era* (published in 2016). There is also a considerable body of older scholarship relevant to his book's subject. For instance Gregg Mitman's *The State of Nature: Ecology, Community, and American Social Thought, 1900-1950* (published in 1992), includes the work of W. C. Allee, who is discussed in Lannoo's book. Philip J. Pauly's *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (published in 2007), focuses on botanists working for the government and is an important source for the history of early twentieth-century field biology and its links to restoration ecology.

Lannoo engages only slightly with the history of ecology in the postwar period, preferring to focus more on the early years of natural history and ecology, and therefore does not have much to say about field biology in the last sixty years. Nor does he explore scientific discussions of the importance of place-based research for contemporary ecology, such as the recent volume edited by Ian Billick and Mary V. Price, *The Ecology of Place: Contributions of Place-Based Research to Ecological Understanding* (published in 2010).

Thus the impression he leaves that field biology has not received much scholarly scrutiny might mislead readers, for it has been a focus of interest for many decades. One telling piece of evidence is that Lannoo's book is based entirely on secondary sources, that is, on the published work of other people (and a few website sources) and not on original investigations of untapped archival materials. Such materials are

vital sources for new historical interpretations. His exhortations to write more histories and more biographies beg the question: who will preserve the source material on which future scholarship depends?

Any future histories, whether of natural history or of ecology, will depend on the preservation of unpublished historical records if scholars are to get behind the scenes and investigate how ecological science is done, as well as how field work and field stations have evolved and grown. Those records in turn will depend on the thoughtful archiving and preservation work of ecologists working in collaboration with librarians.

Past Newsletters have highlighted archival projects, including some recent ones, such as the archive of the H.J. Andrews Forest Long Term Ecological Research project (in the October 2017 newsletter). In this newsletter we highlight archival sources for the history of limnology, also important for understanding the history of field biology.

Limnology Archives at the University of Wisconsin

Wisconsin holds a special place in the history of American ecology for many reasons, one being its central role in the development of limnology. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is considered the birthplace of American limnology because of the work of Edward A. Birge and Chancey Juday. Limnological research was further strengthened by Arthur D. Hasler, a member of the faculty for 41 years. That legacy of research has continued through the North Temperate Lakes Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) project, which began in 1981 as one of the first sites selected for the newly created LTER program. Thanks to the efforts of John Magnuson and librarians at Wisconsin, unpublished materials relating to the history of this LTER program have been preserved in the archives of the Department of Limnology held at the University of Wisconsin. Materials include grant proposals, reviews, minutes of scientific meetings and workshops, minutes of the various committee meetings, correspondence, newsletters and brochures, planning documents, and more. This is a rich treasure trove charting the history of ecology since 1981, with focus on documents from the 1980s and 1990s. The list of archived material can be located from the North Temperate Lakes LTER website at:

https://lter.limnology.wisc.edu/data/document-archive/search

and typing "LTER network" where it indicates "Box title." The University Archivist and Head of UW-Madison Archives at the Steenbock Library is Katie Nash (katie.nash@wisc.edu).

The Archives and Special Collections at the University of Wisconsin-Madison holds a two part oral history with Arthur Hasler, with interviews done in 1977 and 1979.

The Center for Limnology has a digital image collection for the history of limnology. That collection can be searched from the Center's website:

https://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/uw/uwmadison/limnhist/

Edward A. Birge's papers are held at the Wisconsin Historical Society Library and Archives, and the finding ing aid can be found by doing a search through the online archival database ArchiveGrid.