

Wood, J. D., *Horace Alexander, 1889 to 1989: Birds and Binooculars*, York: Sessions, 2003. pp. xii + 191, ISBN 1 85072 289 7, Paper, £12.00.

Horace Alexander is probably best known to Quakers as a peacemaker and friend of Gandhi, and particularly for his contribution towards Indian independence. Although Geoffrey Carnall has contributed an introduction dealing briefly with these and other aspects of his life, Duncan Wood's book is otherwise concerned with Horace's other major involvement – the pursuit of ornithology.

The book is most likely to appeal to those with an interest in birds and bird-watching, and in the history of ornithology in the twentieth century. It charts the pioneering role of Horace Alexander in the transformation of ornithology from a Victorian pre-occupation with 'dead birds in the museum' (often shot for the purpose) to that of a modern science looking at the living bird in its own environment. There is material here on ornithological politics, and a few fairly detailed digressions into the birds themselves, mostly in England but also in India and America. Whilst the author's enthusiasm for both birds and his subject's contribution to their study is evident throughout, the account is also enlivened by its human interest, the result of access to personal documents and the author's own long friendship with Horace. The book is illustrated very attractively by artists Robert Gillmor and Ian Wallace.

In his introduction, Geoffrey Carnall writes that Horace 'studied birds and human beings alike with close attention, and had a keen eye for phenomena that escaped the attention of observers less diligent and much less perceptive'. Duncan Wood draws attention to Horace's own estimation of his passion for bird-watching in that it combined for him, in rich measure, both intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction. His account of his subject's achievements also demonstrates how, even in our own time, science can be pursued and the character of scientific enquiry changed, by those with little more equipment than a keen eye (and ear) for detail and an enquiring mind.

The author writes that, for Horace Alexander, 'peacemaking and ornithology were both expressions of his Quakerism' and that he 'valued them equally and practised them simultaneously'. The concluding chapter seeks to explore the relationship between ornithology and Quaker faith. However, drawing as it does on evidence outside Horace's own (and indeed Quaker) experience, this is mostly concerned with a selection of contemporary Christian views rather than with a specifically Quaker perspective on the natural world and its study. Horace himself seems to have found the 'well-ordered life of birds' conducive to the renewal of his belief in the possibility of 'the peaceable kingdom', and an antidote to the frustrations of human politics that he encountered in his peacemaking work. Duncan Wood refers to Horace's sense of 'companionship' with the birds he watched, experiencing there 'that calm and quietness where, once again, he could find God's presence'.

The publication of this book is perhaps a timely reminder that natural history occupies a significant place in the traditions and experience of British and American Quakerism. This doubtless continues to be reflected in the lives and interests of some individual Friends. However, creative responses to the natural

world currently recognised by Quakers as a group, have tended to take other forms; in the arts, or in the pursuit of advanced scientific research in the physical or biological sciences. Duncan Wood's account of the studies of his mentor and friend demonstrates that the pursuit of natural history can also provide a way of reconnecting not only with the world around us, but with the spirit within.

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Scully, J. L., *Quaker Approaches to Moral Issues in Genetics*, (Series in Quaker Studies Vol. 4). Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002. pp. viii + 276, ISBN 0 7734 7064 6, Cloth, £74.95, \$119.95.

Jackie Leach Scully's book documents the wide variety of responses of Friends to various issues raised by genetic manipulation. Her project, financed by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, involved a number of different lectures and workshops with different Quaker meetings and the use of questionnaires. Although the book covers issues such as patenting and GMOs, the heart of the study is with *human* genetic manipulation.

A central example (fictitious) is used of Freda whose father is believed to have died of what is now called Scully's disease (also fictitious) – a long drawn out degenerative and generally horrible disease. Freda has a 50% chance of inheriting the gene responsible. If she gets it, she *will* die of it, barring earlier death by accident, earlier cancer etc. There is now a test that will tell her whether she has it. Should Freda take it? Scully gets her groups to consider it from four perspectives: Freda herself, her children, her employer and scientists examining the case. These perspectives form the basis of the next four chapters.

Should Freda from her own point of view take the test? Some answered 'yes', since whether the result is positive or negative, it would be better to know – even if positive, self-knowledge is valuable; the knowledge is useful for preparing for the future, and it ends uncertainty. Others felt that she should not find out – she would know later on, meantime her job would be more secure, etc. For some the pain of the knowledge that she had it could be seen, from a theological point of view, as being an opportunity for learning. On the other hand, suppose (in a variation of the story) gene therapy were available which could inhibit or stop the onset of the disease, should she take it? Whilst it may seem obviously beneficial, some saw it as altering 'who she was', so should she do it?

Similar sets of questions are discussed in the later chapters from the perspectives of the children and employers (and also insurers). Ought she to take the test for the children's sake? Do they have a right to know the results (which would affect how they think of their future) or has she a right to keep the information secret? Third party access to genetic information (by insurers and by companies employing people) raises certain issues too. Is giving one's company such information (e.g. if positive) Quaker truthfulness or mere naïveté, given that firms operate generally on the model of 'Money Grabbing Capitalist plc' rather than 'Quaker Elders Company Ltd'?!?