

The Bird Almanac, by David M. Bird (512 pages, February 1999), brings together a wealth of avian information for bird-watchers, whose numbers have swelled recently to make the hobby second only to gardening as the number-one recreation worldwide. More than 200 pages are taken up by a comprehensive checklist of world birds. Other features include facts and illustrations on bird anatomy, the physiology of flight, eggs and nests, world bird records ("highest price paid for a bird book: \$3.96 million for a set of John James Audubon's **The Birds of America** in 1989"), a who's who in bird biology and conservation, lists of birding hotlines and other resources, and numerous tips on choosing binoculars, installing a purple martin house, and setting up a backyard feeder. Bird is director of McGill University's Avian Science and Conservation Center. \$19.95. Firefly Books. ISBN 1-55209-323-9.

Anyone planning a birding trip to Mexico will want to have Steve N. G. Howell's **A Bird-finding Guide to Mexico** (365 pages, January 1999) on hand. Featuring clear directions, maps, key species, and bird lists for specific areas, this guide describes hundreds of sites from Baja to Yucatan. \$29.95. Cornell University Press. ISBN 0-8014-8581-9.

Dictionary of Languages, by Andrew Dalby (734 pages, March 1999), provides dense summaries of more than 400 languages (accompanied by illustrations of non-Roman scripts), an estimate of the number of native speakers, 200 linguistic maps, and numerous sidebars that offer sample usage and comparisons with similar languages. The arrangement is alphabetic, but the entries for major language families have cross-references to specific tongues. Extinct languages like Avestan and classical languages like Old Slavonic are also included. Need to count to 10 in Songhay? Many entries list the words for numbers. In the introduction, Dalby describes how languages are different historical keys to viewing the world, and he answers some frequently asked questions on language learn-

ing. A trained classicist and linguist, Dalby is also honorary librarian at the Institute of Linguists in London. \$50.00. Columbia University Press. ISBN 0-231-11568-7.

One other language spoken and written by thousands of people worldwide is **Legal Language**, the topic and title of a book by Peter M. Tiersma (314 pages, February 1999) that examines the origin, grammar, and syntax of this difficult idiom. The author identifies unusual sentence structures, techniques for improving precision and meaning, and variations in spoken and written legalese. In the process he makes a good case for simplifying it into plain English, especially in contracts, legislation, and jury communications. He suggests that one reason the jury in the O. J. Simpson case reached a verdict of not guilty was Johnnie Cochran's skillful and clear closing argument ("If it doesn't fit, you must acquit"). \$26.00. University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-80302-3.

Heavens Unearthed in Nursery Rhymes and Fairy Tales, by Matt Kane (308 pages, January 1999), reveals the celestial origins of such fairy tales as Snow White, Rumpelstiltskin, and Jack and the Beanstalk. Just as Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend demonstrated in **Hamlet's Mill** (Gambit, 1969) that many myths worldwide were subtle lessons in lunar and solar cycles and the precession of the equinoxes, so Kane shows that Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, and Cinderella all represent lunar eclipses, and Jack's magic beans stand for the five days of the winter solstice. The three blind mice signify the three nights of the new moon, and the seven dwarves symbolize the seven moons between the solstices. Of course, not all nursery rhymes are astronomical ("Ring around the Rosy" had its origins in the 14th-century Black Death), but Kane's well-researched and multicultural survey is a valuable contribution to celestial imagery in classic children's literature. \$24.00. Golden Egg Books, P.O. Box 150, Altoona, PA 16603. ISBN 0-9667076-1-3.

Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America, edited by Elizabeth Reis (276 pages,

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February 1999), examines historical witchcraft and contemporary neopagan goddess religion in the United States. These 12 essays cover diverse topics, among them: the economic basis for witchcraft prosecutions, menacing or unconventional speech as an indicator of witchcraft, the sociology of confession, the slave Tituba and the Salem witch trials, the possession of Martha Roberson in Boston in 1741, the outbreak of witchcraft accusations among the Seneca Indians, the witch murder trial of two Cayuga women in Buffalo in 1930, and the roots of feminist neopaganism. \$45.00. SR Books. ISBN 0-8420-2576-6.

To Die in Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas, 1862-65, by George Levy

(446 pages, March 1998), is a comprehensive history of the prison camp where more Confederates died than at the battles of Shiloh and Vicksburg combined. Located near the former



site of the University of Chicago, Camp Douglas stretched east from Giles to Cottage Grove avenues and north from 31st to 33rd streets—not a popular tourist stop these days. Levy chronicles the wretched conditions at the camp, especially in winter, and unearths

some little-known facts about it: Henry Morton Stanley (“Dr. Livingstone, I presume”), despite his autobiography, was never a prisoner at Camp Douglas; captured slaves of Confederates were held at the camp, even after the Emancipation Proclamation specifically freed them; the enterprising Chicagoan Mrs. Finley, who cut a hole in the wooden outside wall so she could operate a concession stand for prisoners (authorities repeatedly repaired the wall, but she opened it another 11 times), later was appointed sutler for the camp; the Confederate conspiracy of 1864 to attack the camp and free the prisoners was little more than wishful thinking; for 10 cents tourists could climb a wooden tower and get a glimpse of real, live Rebels; and the camp’s biggest escape, when 100 prisoners tunneled under the walls in December 1863, resulted in a severe crackdown. Levy also identifies the Chicago cemeteries where the prison-

ers were buried. \$29.95. Pelican Publishing Co., P.O. Box 3110, Gretna, LA 70054. ISBN 1-56554-331-9.

Witness to Nuremberg, by Bruce M. Stave and Michele Palmer with Leslie Frank (241 pages, November 1998), presents 11 interviews with security guards, translators, attorneys, journalists, and the courtroom’s architect. Unlike legal accounts of the proceedings, these recollections recapture what it was like for ordinary Americans who were at the trials on a daily basis. \$33.00. Twayne. ISBN 0-8057-1628-9.

The Year 1000: What Life Was Like at the Turn of the First Millennium, by Robert Lacey and Danny Danziger

(240 pages, February 1999), takes the reader month-by-month through the first millennial year on a light but knowledgeable tour of Anglo-Saxon England. The authors base much of their description of everyday life on the medieval **Julius Work Calendar**, an illustrated document produced in the writing studio of Canterbury Cathedral sometime around 1020. Topics range from food and wealth to religion, war, and sex, as well as whether or not Christians thought the world would end that year. \$23.00. Little, Brown. ISBN 0-316-55840-0.

Taking up where **The Year 1000** leaves off, John France’s **Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000-1300** (327 pages, February 1999) looks at real estate, limited government, defense technology, and topography to identify the motives and methods of warfare in the High Middle Ages, from the Crusades to the more frequent landowners’ conflicts kindled by the fractured political landscape of the time. Of particular interest are chapters on the nature and use of castles, which served both as fortifications and repositories of sovereignty. \$49.95. Cornell University Press. ISBN 0-8014-3671-0.

For those who prefer their knights and castles as projections on a screen, **The Reel Middle Ages: Films about Medieval Europe**, by Kevin J. Harty (316 pages, March 1999), is just the thing. Harty describes nearly 600 titles, from Georges Méliès’s several films about Joan of Arc in 1897 to Rob Cohen’s *Dragonheart* in 1996, explaining that the Middle Ages presented all the elements of a good story: “love, friendship, intrigue, passion, and war.” Each entry lists published reviews and books or articles for further discussion. \$78.50. McFarland. ISBN 0-7864-0541-4. ■