

and made way for a type of progress he questioned. For example, while he was staying in an igloo with a family, the seal oil lamp flickered out as they were settling in for the night. “How natural strange situations really are,” he wrote, “when you yourself are part of them” (p. 119). He ventured time and again “into a new area of unmapped country” (p. 81) for the Topographical Survey of Canada, eventually earning the title of Dominion Land Surveyor.

“The word ‘impossible’ was unacceptable both to the office in Ottawa, and to Blanchet,” Hoyle (p. 52) writes, and this is the book’s central theme. Blanchet survived where Hornby died. Several encounters between the men show that they both danced with danger and lived by the maxim that “the impossible just took a bit longer.” As an accompanying story to Hornby’s, this book has great merit. But Blanchet’s luck held and his acts of stamina, bravery, and bullheadedness are no less legendary than Hornby’s, except that he kept returning from yet another impossible venture with such regularity that his exploits became routine.

This biography provides a detailed account of life on a survey crew. Blanchet was always called “Chief”: the title distanced him from his men enough to allow him to oversee “a harmonious camp” (p. 52). He always worked harder than his men and yet had to fire only one worker. In 1944, however, three summer employees from Edmonton quit his employ because of the heat, bugs, monotonous food, and the “Chief’s” leadership style. One of them wrote that Blanchet was “aloof” and did not mix with any of the crew, white or Native. “There was no racial discrimination but neither was there any human compassion. He was a hard man to work for” (p. 201).

Blanchet was also a hard man to be. A loner by temperament, he was almost always responsible for a crew of 20 or more men. Often weary at the end of long, hard days, he retreated to his private tent where his reading of classics and philosophy gave him solace. His journal writing gave him an outlet for his thoughts and provided his biographer excellent source material.

Always a detailed strategist and willing to accept any new technology to accomplish a task, he was thwarted many times by the unreliable nature of early airplanes and nearly lost his life more than once in the rickety contraptions that took many lives in the early years of northern aviation.

A married man with a wife to support—he and Eileen had no children—he was one of the 442 civil servants who lost his job on May 1, 1931 as part of government cutbacks. Though he was 47 years old and had an excellent reputation, he was unemployed for most of the next four years.

Many unusual twists and turns fill the pages of this biography, including his trip to New Zealand in 1931, without his wife, before he signed up for war service. “Change in mental attitude,” he wrote of his disgust with the military while in training, “impatience with youth and stupidity, and an increasing intolerance” (p. 166). He had lied about his age—lopping off 10 years—but was caught out and rejected from military service because of a heart

murmur. Just as well, because Blanchet became involved with surveying the Canol pipeline route, which delivered outrageously expensive oil from Fort Norman on the Mackenzie River to Whitehorse for just a few months during World War II. Hoyle could have expanded on this project’s futility. “[I] always thought more of the work than my job,” (p. 187) Blanchet wrote while embroiled in conflict with the American generals in charge of the Canol project—know-it-alls who made uneducated decisions that challenged the alignment of Blanchet’s carefully researched route.

As always, Blanchet was happiest when stomping through the bush. His career ended on a high point in the 1950s, when he surveyed the route for the Trans Mountain Pipeline, a line that continues to move oil through the mountains to this day. He settled down to a writing life on Vancouver Island in his later years—though he had already been publishing articles and book reviews in *The Beaver* magazine since the 1930s. Spurred on by the success of his first book, *Search in the North* (1960), he began writing his autobiography, but he died of a heart attack in 1966 before completing his work.

“Westerners are Barbarians,” (p. 215) Blanchet wrote while on a solo holiday in Japan during his retirement. Like his friend and neighbour R.M. Patterson, Blanchet seemed most at home when seeking adventure—or at least away from the crowd that represented the encroaching civilization. And yet, a relative said that Blanchet had “a smile like the sun coming out” (p. 216). Hoyle concludes that Blanchet was “a man of contrasts,” and his excellent biography introduces us to parts of the complex outer and inner life of a man who epitomized the northern surveyor.

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OWLS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA: A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THEIR BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR. By WAYNE LYNCH. Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press and Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-7748-1459-1. xxii + 242 p., 19 maps, 2 tables, 208 colour photos, bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$44.95.

This book warrants only superlatives. Wayne Lynch, a doctor who gave up medicine to pursue his passion for wildlife photography, has made wise use of his scientific

training. He has spent much of his life studying owls in the field, in many countries, and he shares here his most interesting observations. He has also delved deeply into the byways of ornithological literature to unearth fascinating aspects of the specialized anatomy and physiology of owls.

Throughout the book, Lynch shares with us many amazing owl facts. I will give one example, the wing loading of owls, for readers who have given little thought to the topic. I was surprised to learn that the great gray owl, with a much smaller body than the snowy owl and great horned owl, has a wing surface area up to 3277 cm², equal to the area of five sheets of typing paper. The snowy owl is second, with an average of 2574 cm² and the great horned owl is third, with 2503 cm². Yet the snowy owl is much heavier, with an average weight of 1.81 kg, compared to the great horned at 1.45 kg and the great gray at 1.09 kg. Hence the wing loading, the amount of body weight carried by each unit of wing area, is larger in the snowy owl. The lighter great gray, with lower wing loading, can fly more slowly: it has adapted to its special niche—catching smaller prey, chiefly voles.

Owl species that nest in the Arctic receive special attention because of their remarkable adaptations to a hostile environment with boom-and-bust cycles in the numbers of prey. Two species, the snowy owl and short-eared owl, nest upon the ground in tundra. The northernmost recorded nesting in the world of any owl, a snowy owl, was at 82°40' N, on Ellesmere Island. Adolphus Greely found a nest there in the 1880s, and Lynch found another nest, on the same island, in 1996! The northernmost short-eared owl nesting recorded to date, in 2000 and 2001, was in Aulavik National Park on northern Banks Island, at 73° N. Snowy owls normally lay three to five eggs, and short-eared owls, five to six: double the average number laid by a female great horned owl. Yet when lemmings or voles are numerous, single females of both short-eared and snowy owls have been known to lay as many as 11 eggs. In a year when prey is scarce, neither species attempts to nest.

The three large owl species that nest in far northern and montane forests (as far north as the Arctic Circle in Alaska) are the better-known great horned owl and the two most beautiful owls, the great gray owl and the northern hawk owl, high on the “most wanted” list of the average birder on this continent. When vole numbers drop, every three to five years, the great gray and northern hawk owls irrupt, leaving the boreal forests and appearing in greater numbers far to the south. In Minnesota in January and February 2005, it was possible for one observer to see over a hundred great gray owls in a single day! Northern hawk owls and boreal owls may participate in such irruptions but in somewhat smaller numbers.

There are a few minor errors. Lynch uses the antiquated spelling of widgeon for wigeon and the surname of evolutionary biologist J. Alan Feduccia is misspelled in the otherwise excellent bibliography. I do take issue with one preposterous statement on page 97, based on extrapolation from a Johnsgard reference, that a single barn owl might

eat 11 000 mice in a 10-year lifetime and thus save 13 tons of grain crops! Barn owl expert Carl Marti tells me that few barn owls live 10 years, their average life span being just under two years.

This is a truly beautiful book, filled with near-perfect photographs, all but two by this expert wildlife photographer. Despite a large printing run, after six weeks of selling like hotcakes, the book is already being revised in preparation for a second printing (in which the very few detected errors will be corrected). I predict more printings in years to come.

In summary, this book is a perfect blend of fact and beauty. The high-quality photos, almost one per page (three habitat photos are two-page spreads), are easily worth the price. But don't stop there, because the text will provide much interesting information about what to me are the most interesting and beautiful of all birds. This book is an ideal gift for anyone even remotely interested in nature and especially for anyone who appreciates superb photography.

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THE ARCTIC PROMISE: LEGAL AND POLITICAL AUTONOMY OF GREENLAND AND NUNAVUT.

By NATALIA LOUKACHEVA. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-8020-9486-5. xiv + 255 p., maps, notes, bib., index. Softbound. Cdn\$27.95; £18.00.

In recent years, Inuit peoples of the circumpolar North have made significant progress towards self-government and autonomy. *The Arctic Promise: Legal and Political Autonomy of Greenland and Nunavut* by Natalia Loukacheva charts the evolution of two of the most important outcomes of this process: the establishment of a home rule government in Greenland in 1979 and the creation of the territory of Nunavut in 1999. Although separated by two decades and embedded in two different domestic contexts, these regions share many similarities, both in their internal characteristics and in their relationships with external actors and governments. They also reveal a unique system of governance that is dynamic in nature and “inclusive of Southern modes of governance, indigenous knowledge and values, and flexible legal imagination on the scope of autonomy” (p. 9). This is the “Arctic Promise” to which the author refers in the title of the book.

In many respects, this book is a significant contribution to our understanding of the political development of the circumpolar North. Although there have been a number of excellent English language studies of politics and governance in Nunavut and, to a lesser extent, Greenland, very few, if any, have systematically compared the legal, political, and jurisdictional features of these two regions. In addition