

The warden's words

I hope you are enjoying the 25th anniversary issue of *International Game Warden* magazine. This magazine has seen many changes, including three publishers and editors, in its quarter century of existence, but information about game warden books has been a fixture for most of its life. Some of the early issues had full page reviews of just one book, and later issues included lists of books, provided by a number of readers of the day. In 1994, avid reader, book collector and Iowa Game Warden, Bob Mullen was one of the people who provided lists of books to the magazine. He then approached editor Don Hastings and asked him if he'd like a recurring book review column in the magazine. Obviously he did, as the "Rathouse Reader" debuted in the Winter 1994-95 issue. The column remained a regular feature in the magazine until the Fall 2003 issue, which was printed shortly after Bob's retirement. Bob would usually write a short review of four or five books in each column in a straight-forward, no-nonsense style. His columns were often embellished with a short tale about "The Rookie" and his latest goof-up or stupid question. Upon retirement Bob and his wife decided to move into a smaller home, and with no room for his large collection of game warden books, he donated them to the North American Wildlife Enforcement Museum and then ramped things up for the next phase of his life.

I recently caught up with Bob to see how retirement is treating him and I was delighted to find him happy, healthy and as active as ever. He advises that he has never been busier and hardly has any spare time to get to the "honey-do" list. He is working part-time at a shooting supply company, spending time with his granddaughters, has been travelling, and of course is enjoying his favorite pastime, squirrel hunting.

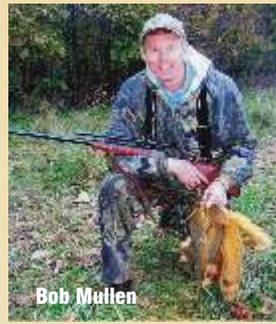
We also spent some time talking about game warden books and the idiosyncrasies of our respective departments. I then asked him about "the Rookie" and he advised me that no one person like that (thankfully) ever existed and that "the Rookie" was basically a character who embodied all of the ridiculous things other officers told him about the new young officers they worked with.

For the two years following Bob's departure, apart from a couple individual book reviews in the magazine, no one filled the void left by the Rathouse

Reader. I contributed several articles for the Summer 2005 issue, and as a small thank-you our editor sent me a copy of a book he'd received from a publisher. One thing led to another and I offered to take a stab at penning at least one book "information" column. I've never looked back, and apart from one hiccup in 2006, have been contributing to each issue of the magazine ever since. In honor of the 25th anniversary of this publication, I'd like to thank Bob Mullen for paving the way for me to carry on what has become a bit of an IGW tradition. I'd also like to thank the two previous editors – Don Hastings Sr. and Laura Spradley for keeping the IGW torch lit, and of course the current editor Doug Lucyshyn, for all his hard work since taking the helm after NAWEOA bought the magazine in 2002.

I wrote about Mike Bradshaw, author of "*Texas Game Warden Chronicles*" in the last issue. The book can now be ordered directly from Mike's family, either by going to www.mikebradshaw.org/html/order.html where you can place an automated order with PayPal, by emailing contact@mikebradshaw.org or by snail-mail to Mesquite Bean Press, PO Box 643, Carrizo Springs, TX 78834. The cost of the book is \$39.95, and shipping ranges from \$5.95 for one book to \$20 for up to five books within the USA, or \$15 to \$20 for shipping internationally.

Being a typical cheap (or is it underpaid) conservation officer there aren't many game warden books that I'd want to pay \$39.95 for, but "*Texas Game Warden Chronicles*" is one that is well worth the money. This book stands out like a beacon in my bookshelves, as it's easily one of the largest books in the genre that I've encountered. It's hard bound with a printed cover (no dust jacket) and it's a really wonderful tribute to the author as he clearly he put his heart and soul into it. Honestly, I was immediately taken aback by the look and feel of it when it arrived, but its appeal is not merely cosmetic. Although I haven't taken the time to read more than a few chapters, because at 321 double columned pages it is a massive volume, what I have read



thus far is first class. It is one of those books that will take many, many sittings to finish, not because it is tedious reading, but because there is such a vast quantity of material in it. Mike certainly covered the gamut, writing about the origins of the department, many of the old time wardens, many interesting cases, and even a bit about himself. There are black and white photographs throughout the book, as well

as an appendix containing photographs of Texas Game Warden and Supervisor badges.

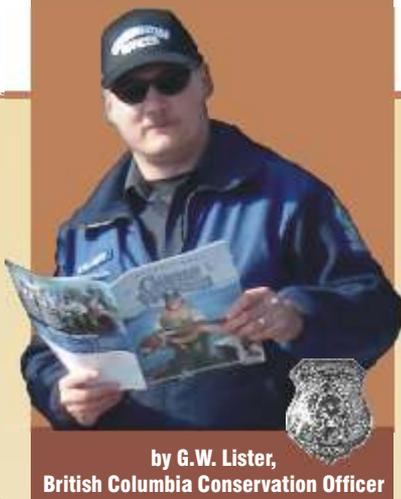
Debbie Bradshaw advises that it is selling well, so make sure and get a copy while it's still available.

If you have an interest in western American culture, Wyoming game management history or game wardens, then "*Men to Match Our Mountains*" (ISBN 1-932636-32-3) by Wyoming's Chief Game Warden Jay Lawson, is a recommended read. It was published in 2007 by Pronghorn Press, but I just received a copy a few months ago. It provides a fascinating glimpse into Wyoming's past and some of the men (and women) who were responsible for early game management in the state, as well as some other colourful western characters. It is very easy to read and hard to put down.

All proceeds from the sale of "*Men to Match Our Mountains*" are donated to the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of Wyoming to further the conservation of Wyoming's wildlife. The book is available for \$21.95 plus \$10 shipping directly from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department Online Store at <https://gf.state.wy.us/ae/> or from Amazon books if you want to save a few bucks but donate less money to the Foundation.

"*Murder for a Buck*" (ISBN 978-1-60264-298-0) is a novel by a new author in the game warden field - retired Siskiyou County, California Deputy Prosecutor Mark Travis. The author is not new to the book writing field however, having previously penned numerous mystery novels. The main character in "*Murder for a Buck*" is California Game Warden Lieutenant Ethan Cooper, who has recently been promoted and transferred to a northern district, after spending most of his career in coastal California. A hunter is murdered after harvesting a trophy buck, and the killer steals the deer. Warden Cooper investigates the suspected hunting accident scene, but is not convinced it was an accident based on evidence at the site. Cooper proceeds to conduct an investigation, and soon finds an ally, and a love interest, in the Deputy District Attorney.

Aside from the personal relationship angle, this book is for the most part a fairly mainstream game warden novel, if there is such a thing. The main theme revolves around two parallel investigations – the hunting accident and bear poaching. The author does a great job of using flashbacks to



by G.W. Lister,
British Columbia Conservation Officer

give us insight into the mind of a poacher and killer and easily sucks the reader right into the story. I really liked this book, as it was full of game warden work (a California warden did provide advice to the author) and was actually quite plausible. It was a hard book to put down and whenever I had spare time I would get back to it to find out what happened next. Just when I was confident that I had it all figured out, and was sure that it was just another predictable story, I was surprised by a sudden turn of events.

At 202 pages, “*Murder for a Buck*” is not a long novel, but at only \$11.95 US it is pretty darn good value for your money. It can be ordered online directly from www.virtualbookworm.com, or from most of the major online vendors, including Amazon (.com and .ca) and Barnes and Noble.

Laurel E. Neme has written “*Animal Investigators*” (2009) which gives us an inside look at three varied wildlife investigations that involved the Clark A. Bavin U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Forensics Laboratory. The first case, which was initiated only as a fact finding case, not an enforcement investigation, involves walrus carcasses washed up on beaches in Alaska that appear to have been killed only for their tusks. The book details the history of native subsistence hunting and the related regulations, and how the lab worked to establish techniques to determine why the walrus were killed, and who (Russian or Alaskan Natives) killed them. This section of the book then goes on to talk about changes that were effected as a result of this investigation, and also details an undercover operation that took place concurrent with the forensic investigation.

The next section of the book details two separate bear gall investigations,

one in British Columbia and one in Wyoming, and how the lab worked to establish a technique to differentiate bear galls from galls of other animals that are often alleged to be from bear. This section then goes on to discuss the bear gall industry in Asia.

The third section revolves around an undercover case into the illegal import into the US of CITES protected Amazonian bird parts. It details the difficulties in accurately identifying the species of bird from individual feathers found in various articles of ceremonial dress created by Brazilian rain-forest Indian tribes.

The book is very well researched and contains much data, all of which is foot-noted and cited. Yet the book is easy to follow and very interesting, and unlike many books that get categorized into the “environmentalism” genre there is no anti-hunting overtone here, which makes the book much more appealing to readers of this magazine. Author Neme shows us how the lab was able to adapt and develop new techniques relative to previously unknown issues, and discusses how it will need to continue to evolve and develop techniques as more species of wildlife, and plants, become threatened and endangered.

“*Animal Investigators*” (ISBN 978-1-4165-5056-3) is published by Scribner’s and is available in hardcover through most major booksellers, either in-store or online, for \$25 (USD) or less.

The ninth Joe Pickett novel, “*Below Zero*”, by C.J. Box was released on June 16th. Joe is now exiled to the Baggs District - known within the department as “The Place Where Game Wardens Are Sent To Die” - in extreme south-central Wyoming, so that he can fly under the radar while all the heat from his previous adventure (*Blood Trail*) dies down. Not much happens in Baggs until the Mad Archer arrives and Joe takes no time putting the cuffs on him, but catching the local poacher is only a distraction from the bigger mission to come. Joe’s wife and girls have remained in Saddlestring, and Joe is called home when his eldest daughter receives a text message from a girl claiming to be their foster daughter April, who was believed

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to have been killed in a federal raid on the Sovereign Cult's stronghold six years earlier (Winterkill). The sender of the texts knows things that only Joe's girls and April could know and despite what he saw, Joe believes that April might have survived the raid.

The girl is travelling with a Chicago mobster and his son and could be in danger, as it is suspected that the men are responsible for a number of murders since they left Chicago two weeks earlier. Despite Joe's faltering relationship and mistrust of the FBI he feels he must go to them for some assistance, but he can't give them all the facts and let them run with the investigation, because he believes that might jeopardize the safety of the girl. He enlists the assistance of his old friend Nate Romanowski, who is in hiding after escaping from federal custody the previous fall, as well as his own 17 year old daughter Sheridan, and sets out to find the girl before the Feds can swoop in and botch things up. This time it's very personal, as this may be Joe's shot at redemption for failing to rescue his foster daughter six years prior.

"Below Zero" shows us a toned-down Joe Pickett when compared to previous novels. Although he is still a driven man and on a mission, his moves seem more calculated and more mature, and he doesn't make the same types of mistakes he has made in the past. Despite that, author Box has created another page turner that is tough to put down because of the irresistible desire to find out how all the pieces come together. If you've enjoyed the previous Joe Pickett novels, you'll certainly enjoy this one. The Joe Pickett series is not "pure" game warden literature, but that doesn't bother me at all. I read a lot of game warden material, and occasionally I just want to read something that is totally distracting and purely entertaining, but I don't have the time or desire to read material that has no game warden connection whatsoever. When that's the case I don't need to transgress into another genre, because the Joe Pickett novels fit the bill for me. If you've never read any of them, and you like a good murder mystery type novel, but want to be able to relate a bit to the hero, this series is top-notch.

"Below Zero" is available at most major booksellers, either in-store or online.

There aren't many films out there that highlight our chosen profession, so even though this is primarily a book related column, I try and provide information about other game warden related media that may be of interest to readers of this magazine. So, if you are not aware of the current plight of California game wardens, there is a new DVD available from Snow Goose Productions entitled "*Endangered Species: California Fish & Game Wardens*" that will give you the lowdown. Not only does it explain the current California warden shortage and the prognosis for the Fish and Game Department, but it provides us with a great insight into the job of a California Game Warden.

Producer James Swan is a huge supporter of the California Game Wardens, and is the author of "*In Defense of Hunting*", so this film highlights the importance of what game wardens do, what could happen if the current situation doesn't change, and the dangers and frustrations that wardens face. As conservation officers and game wardens ourselves, we are somewhat familiar with the ins and outs of the job, but may not be so familiar with the particulars of the job in California. This video is a bit of an eye opener and aside from being a great educational tool, and providing some entertainment, it makes a valuable addition to the game warden book/video collector's library at a very reasonable cost. The DVD's special features also include statistics about game warden staffing numbers across North America, and some interesting trivia about game wardens.

DVD copies of "*Endangered Species*" can be purchased from Snow Goose Productions, P.O. Box 2460, Mill Valley, CA 94942 for \$22.00 US (\$25.00 foreign) which includes tax, and shipping and handling. As far as I know it is only available in North American NTSC format. For more details about the video or to order it with PayPal go to www.jamesswan.com/snowgoose/wardendoc.html.

And that wraps it up for another edition of the Warden's Words. Until next time, stay safe out there. ♣

GW

If you would like Gerry to review your book, you can contact him at:

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