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Wood's "Horace Alexander, 1889 to 1989: Birds and Binoculars" - Book Review

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himself seems to have found the 'well-ordered life of birds' conducive to the interests of some individual Friends. However, creative responses to the natural American Quakerism. This doubtless continues to be reflected in the lives and human beings alike with close attention, and had a keen eye for phenomena that mostly concerned with a selection of contemporary Christian views rather than making 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 book is most likely to appeal to those with an interest in birds and birdwatching, 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 enriched 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, 'peace-making 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 peace-making 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.