

book review

Red Fox: the catlike canine by J. David Henry. 1986. Smithsonian Institution Press. Washington, D.C. 174 pp. (ISBN No. 87474-520-9).

David Henry's 14-year study of the behavior and ecology of the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) in Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park is summarized in this delightful book. Henry's work is field ethology and natural history at its best. The book is masterfully written overall; only once does the author lapse into anatomical terms that may bring back bad memories of comparative anatomy classes (when you failed to identify the entepicondylar foramen of the humerus). Chapters 1-2 describe fox habitat and life history. Chapters 4-7 examine the evolution and survival value of various hunting behaviors. The final chapter is a thought-provoking discussion of the level of animal awareness: including the suggestion that examining rare behaviors – in addition to routine easily categorized patterns – may provide insight into what occurs inside an animal's head. I particularly enjoyed discussions of the evolution of foxes as catlike canids, the physics of fox hunting (The Fox as Guided Missile), and the attempts to understand food cache and urine marking behaviors. Following Niko Tinbergen. Henry conducted a series of elegantly simple field experiments to test hypotheses on the development of hunting behaviors (at a level that seemed quite appropriate. I might add, within a National Park). There are lessons to be learned both from David Henry's research approach and his philosophy: "... I am struck by the similarity between testing hypotheses and raising children. Both are initiated as a result of creative moments. Both children and hypotheses need a good deal of nurturing in order to develop, and ultimately both must be let go of because in a very real sense they have lives of their own to live. I suppose one more similarity must be acknowledged – in both cases the progenitor follows the development of his offspring with considerable interest."

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