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The Newsletter of the IUCN/SSC Mollusc Specialist Group

International Union for Conservation of Nature & Species Survival Commission

Book review, page 48-49

Recent publication relevant to mollusc conservation.

Elisabeth Tova Bailey, 2010. *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA. ISBN 978-1-56512-606-0. US\$18.95. Reviewed by *the Editor*

Endorsed by renowned biologist and conservationist Edward O. Wilson as ‘beautiful’, this was one of my most enjoyable reads for a long time. Filled with humour, pathos and a gentle wonder, this delightful and exquisitely written book is the reflection of a young woman, ill and bedridden, who draws strength from observing the life of a snail picked up by a friend in the nearby woodland and given to her with a pot of violets. The snail was identified for her by Tim Pearce (a regular contributor to *Tentacle*) as *Neohelix albolabris*, a woodland snail of eastern North America.

As the year goes by, the author becomes increasingly fascinated by her snail, watching its behaviour, reproduction and so on. Soon she wants to know more about snails, so she delves far and wide into the literature, ranging from Darwin’s *Origin and Descent of Man* to Wilson’s *Biophilia*, via Barker’s *The Biology of Terrestrial Mollusca*, Wilbur’s *The Mollusca* and Solem’s *The Shell Makers*, literature that no doubt is familiar to many readers of *Tentacle*. She cites papers by Tim Pearce, Eddie Gittenberger and even by me. And she even quotes my own Ph.D. supervisor, Arthur Cain, and his botanist friend Tony Bradshaw.

The book is not about snail conservation, but as an expression of sheer wonder at the beauty and complexity of a small brown snail the book is a reflection of what I suspect drives most of us to work to preserve malacological diversity. If more people were as inquisitive and open to thinking about molluscs, and biodiversity in general, as Bailey is, our work in conservation would be much much easier. I gave this book to everyone in my lab at the University of Hawaii and I encourage all readers of *Tentacle* to go out and get a copy. You can read more about it at the author’s website.

Robert H. Cowie, *Tentacle* Editor.