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The Run



Synopsis

40th anniversary of a Cape Cod classic Perched on the banks of Stony Brook in the Cape Cod town of Brewster, Hay observes the stunning phenomenon of the annual run of the alewife, a herring that spawns in fresh water, enters the ocean as a fingerling, and returns to its natal pond.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In a book first published in 1959 and now reissued in an anniversary edition, John Hay, the nature-writing laureate of Cape Cod, ponders one of the great curiosities of nature in those parts. The mystery in question is the annual migration of the alewife, a kind of herring that behaves in this respect much like the salmon, moving at infancy from the freshwater lakes of New England into the cold Atlantic Ocean and thence back to the waters of its birth. The journey, Hay writes, is oddly heroic, and it comes at great cost: some 90 percent of the adult alewives do not survive the arduous move from ocean to stream. Hay's prose, too, is oddly enchanting, given that his subject is a fish--and a none-too-lovely one at that. No matter, for Hay describes the alewife as "a life that shone with vibrant persistence, one of nature's particularized energies, a wild texture as old as the animal world, a food that was the beneficent matter of all struggle and greed." His pages ring with such fish-born poetry as he recounts the life cycle of the alewife from wriggling larva to adult. The migration of this intriguing fish, he concludes, "is not only a matter of routes or seasonal behavior. It has to do with an internal response to this spinning globe and its unendingly creative energies." That creative energy nicely describes the spirit of this slender study, as well as Hay's other fine books. --Gregory McNamee

J Hay is a Beacon Press author.

I read this book 30 years ago and decided to become a naturalist, but I found the coursework too dry. I got it for my wife and reread it myself, finding it as gripping now as then. Part of the reason is that The Run, which is in Brewster MA, was my backyard growing up But I would urge anyone with an interest in nature to read this charmer.

Great Book! For any nostalgic fisherman! Very interesting and informative read!

A story that weaves its own spell.

I first read this book in the early 1970s when I was conducting my Ph.D. thesis research, which dealt with the migratory behavior of a fish called the alewife, also known as river herring. Alewife are like small, silvery salmon. About 10 inches long, they migrate into small streams and rivers along the East Coast in the spring to spawn, and the juveniles then migrate to the ocean in the fall, where they live for four or five years before returning to their home stream to spawn. John Hay captures the mystery and delight of an alewife run. Unlike salmon runs that occur in large rivers where the fish can't be seen, alewife migrate into many very small streams, many of which pass through towns and under old mills, such that the fish are readily visible to people. To see thousands of fish stacked up at the base of a dam, knowing that they had traveled thousands of miles in the Atlantic for years before finding their way back to the location where their life began as an egg, is almost incredible. John Hay describes the essence of the alewife in a very informative but tremendously readable style. This is a must read for anyone who enjoys fine writing and has an interest in the natural world.

Sublime and enchanting is how John Hay has the reader feeling. It is truly a superb book, well written and thoughtful as well as thought provoking.

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