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Review of *The Explorers' Texas: The Animals They Found* by Del Weniger

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The Explorers' Texas: The Animals They Found. Del Weniger. Austin: Eakin Press, 1997. v+200 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, references. \$27.95 cloth (ISBN 1-57168-100-0).

As a mammalogist residing in central Texas, I often try to imagine the great diversity and abundance of mammals present in this state prior to western settlement. There are of course legendary accounts in Texas history and folklore of some of the larger mammals, such as buffalo, bears, and wolves, but I know of no book that systematically recounts the historical distribution, abundance, and behavior of what was once an amazing collection of mammals. Del Weniger's study takes its place as such a unique and well-researched account. This is the second volume of his research, the first covering *The Land and Waters*. Although subtitled *The Animals They Found*, the coverage is exclusively mammalian (volumes three and four will cover birds and plants, respectively).

Weniger's accounts are based on his research of explorers' notes and diaries as they traveled and settled in Texas from the late seventeenth century until 1860. While admittedly an arbitrary cutoff date, Weniger justifies it by

stating that "after that date, in most of Texas, the plant and animal populations were being so altered that the original living communities were no longer intact or recognizable" (interested readers should note that the U.S. Biological Survey conducted a historically important scientific study of the state after this time period). Based on the accounts of 290 explorers, Weniger sets out to do three things: reveal Texas mammal populations under pristine conditions; reveal the historic status of the current mammal fauna; and show the effects of modern development on mammalian fauna. Ten of the fifteen chapters are concerned with one species (e.g., buffalo, deer, pronghorn, antelope, elk, and mountain sheep) or at least a major species group (e.g., bears, wolves and coyotes, cats, foxes, hogs, and rabbits). Four chapters are collections of species accounts (chapter 11, for example, covers "critters" including raccoons, ringtails, badgers, skunks, rats, and armadillos). Each chapter proceeds to recount, when possible, the distribution, abundance, and behavior of the mammal of interest. Many of the explorers' accounts are quoted at length, allowing readers to come up with their own interpretations; yet Weniger never shies away from providing his informed interpretation, which is usually insightful and entertaining. As a scientist, I was confused in places by his use of common names, but he would eventually refer to the proper scientific authorities in most cases. The writing, while at times a bit wordy, is accessible to anyone with an interest in the subject. A few distributional maps are provided; I would have preferred more.

There is much in this book I will add to my own lectures on the mammals of Texas. I recommend it highly to any teacher or lecturer. It is also an invaluable contribution to anyone with an academic interest in the historical mammalian fauna of Texas, including the southern part of the Great Plains, and is no less fascinating to anyone who has tried to imagine what the animal life in Texas was like prior to modern development. I look forward to reading Weniger's forthcoming books on the birds and plants of Texas.
David O. Ribble, *Department of Biology, Trinity University, Texas.*