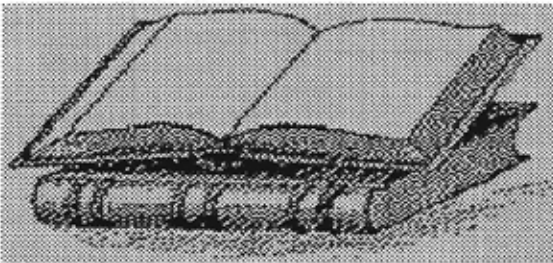


sensitive treatment of the beauty and importance of the integrity of wild wetland habitats and their most noted 'flagship' species, the alligator.

This book is well suited to the task of serving as a vehicle of outreach to a lay public hungering for information about big, spectacular (and potentially dangerous) reptiles, especially those in their midst. It is very attractive, inviting passers-by to thumb through the superb photographs. The book's strength in this area comes from the principle author's background as a photographer and professor of art at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The book grew from the author's efforts directing a group of students photographing the controlled alligator hunts in Florida in 1985 and her later work with the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission creating an education package. The photographs in this book, however, are not just educational or informational; they are art in every sense of the word.

The photographic body of the work is structured in sequences, each of which is based on a central concept or feeling and supported by a series of poems, song lyrics, vignettes and essays. Much of the text is focused on the three essays: "Living in Wetlands" by Jane Gibson, a conservation anthropologist, describes the history, economics and impact of the alligator meat and skin industry upon "Shellcracker Haven", a pseudonym for a small Florida fishing town in the Oklawaha River watershed. No one has to be told that Le Roy Overstreet, the 70 year old author of the second essay "Memories of gator hunts", is well experienced in his subject. Although much of this information may be 'old hat' to crocodylian field biologists, it is still an enjoyable read—particularly when supplemented with the incredible photographs of alligator hunting and processing? Just wait until you see the photo of several dozen dismembered alligator eyeballs looking up at you from an ice chest! But then I learned that University of Florida researchers are working on the molecular biology of the eyeballs rhodopsin pigment. The link between the striking photograph and interesting information works well. J. Whitfield Gibbons' essay, "Living with alligators," adds a degree of scientific authority and credibility to the book's call for sustainability as a paradigm for managing alligator populations and their wetland habitats. Gibbons' essay stands as one of the book's high points and further supports his growing reputation as the heir to Aldo Leopold and one of today's leading standard

REVIEW



ALLIGATORS, PREHISTORIC PRESENCE IN THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE. by Martha A. Strawn, with essays by Le Roy Overstreet, Jane Gibson and J. Whitfield Gibbons, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore:227 p.(1997). Dinosaurs are 'in' with the American public, and if dinosaurs are in can crocodylians be far behind? Not if this beautiful and carefully produced book has anything to do with it. It presents a thoughtful and

bearers for a sustainable and defensible American land ethic.

The only downside I can see in this book is the potentially inflammatory impact it could have in galvanizing the animal rights community into action against the alligator industry. There are some quite vivid and pull-no-punches photographs taken at alligator slaughter and processing facilities, although these are clearly done as an expression of artistic creativity and I would strongly defend the author's right to include them. I would only suggest that, as this book becomes widely available, the industry may want to 'brace' itself accordingly.

One of my few annoyances with the book was the lack of condensed captions adjacent to each photograph. In its present format one has to continually turn to a concluding section of photo credits to learn where, what or who is depicted. There are a few captions, but the book would benefit from many more. The book uses the literary style of annotated footnotes for its literature cited. I did not find anything new from the open scientific literature, but there were quite a few references to gray literature and government documents that I was glad to learn about.

In summary, I would compare this book favorably to a series of recent rather spectacular publications such as "Gator" by L. T. Mahoney, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley CA 94704) and "A Social History of the American Alligator" by L. Vaughn, Glasgow, St. Martins Press, New York (1991). This book by Strawn clearly outclasses most of the others in the quality of its creativity and art. It even begins to fall into the same class as "Eyelids of the Morning", which places it in very good company indeed. -- I. Lehr Brisbin Jr., Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, P.O. Drawer E, Aiken, SC 29802, USA.