BOOKENDS

Ambushed on the Jaguar Trail: Hidden Cameras on the Mexican Border.

Jack and Anna Mary Childs. 2008.

Tucson: Rio Nuevo, 152 pp. \$19.95.

ISBN 978-1933855097

Available at Tucson Audubon Nature Shops

This is not a book about jaguars; it's not even a book about big cats. The cover, however, is delightfully enticing: the corroded "Ambushed" prominently placed front and center, an in-your-face jaguar emerging from a black desert night. Intentional or not, this captivating layout hooked me. The book's substance, of course, is in the subtitle, *Hidden Cameras on the Mexican Border*.

Jack and Anna Childs live near Amado, AZ, and one morning encountered a live jaguar in 1996.

Later, they founded the Borderlands Jaguar

Detection Project, and the team installed non-invasive cameras to monitor the region. Amazingly, they did capture the first photos of wild jaguars on Arizona soil, including over 50 shots of beautiful Macho B. But after a decade of surveillance, the outcome documented here is so much more than cats. The volume is about the project, the cameras, animal behaviors, and then some, and the results ultimately illuminate the entire ecosystem.

Filled with fabulous "gotcha!" photos from strategically placed remote-sensor cameras, one is immediately transported to a very busy world indeed. Skunks, bears, deer, coati troops, rabbits, raccoons, badgers, coyotes, birds and, yes, humans; they're all here and each image attracts attention. The cameras are often detectable, hence the amusing hominid shots.

I found each photograph uniquely significant, but my favorite series is that of a wildfire. The camera, tripped by roaring flames and heat, records all. A torched agave, farthest hills ablaze, ash and smoke. Finally, a white-tailed deer moves through burnt residue. However, the smaller photos sprinkled through the pages are just that: too small, and several are downright worthless. I wanted to study the details!

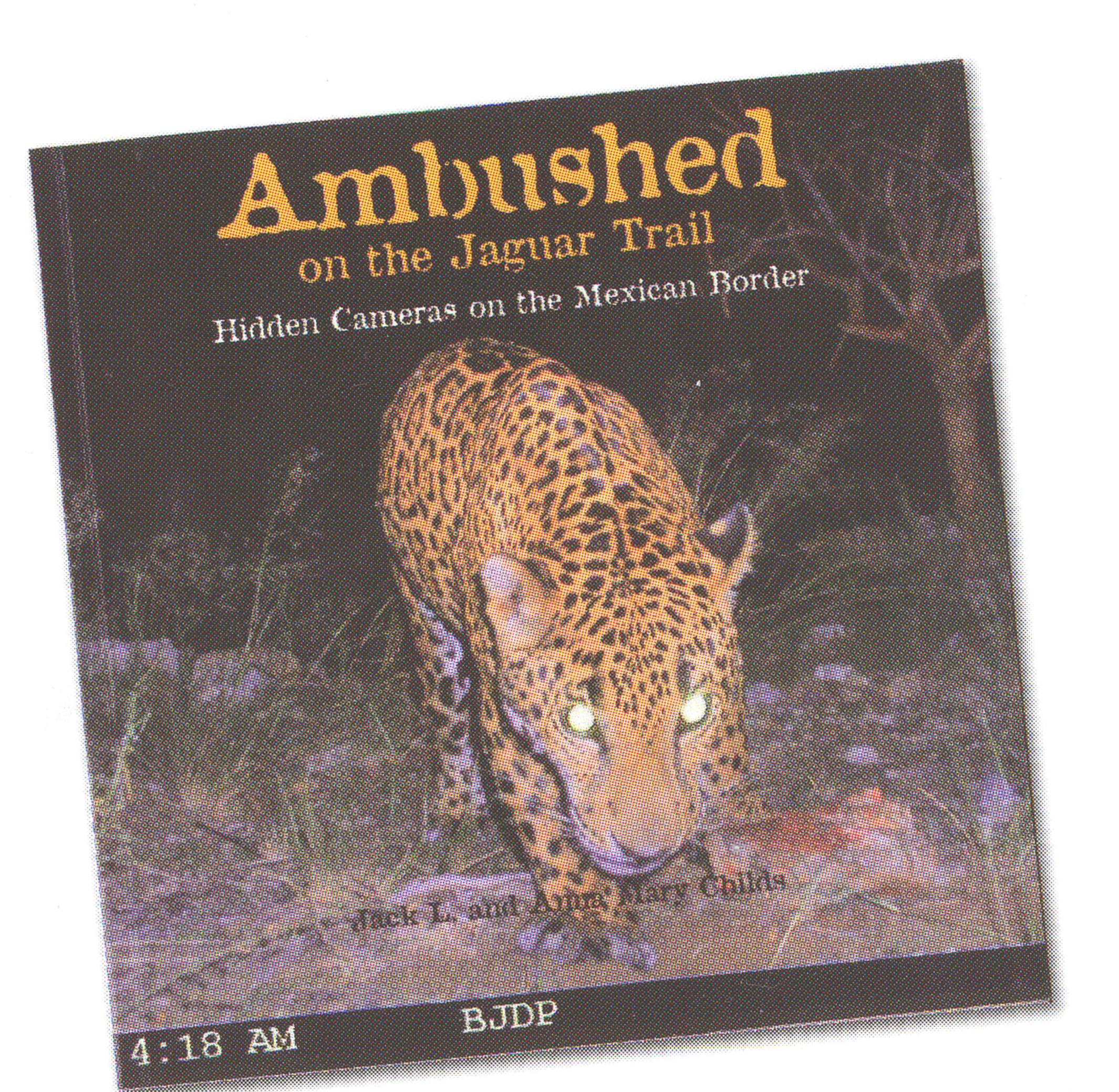
Ambushed on the Jaguar Trail is an enjoyable, quick read. Narrated with informal, first-person accounts and agreeable anecdotes, the Childs' relaxed style is ideally in keeping with the surprising candid shots. I found it particularly interesting because the book is not just about jaguars. I recommend it to anyone interested in animal behavior, in conservation, in our borderland regions. The book spotlights our Sonoran backyard, literally, and brings to life events that many of us think we know about but have never seen. Until now.

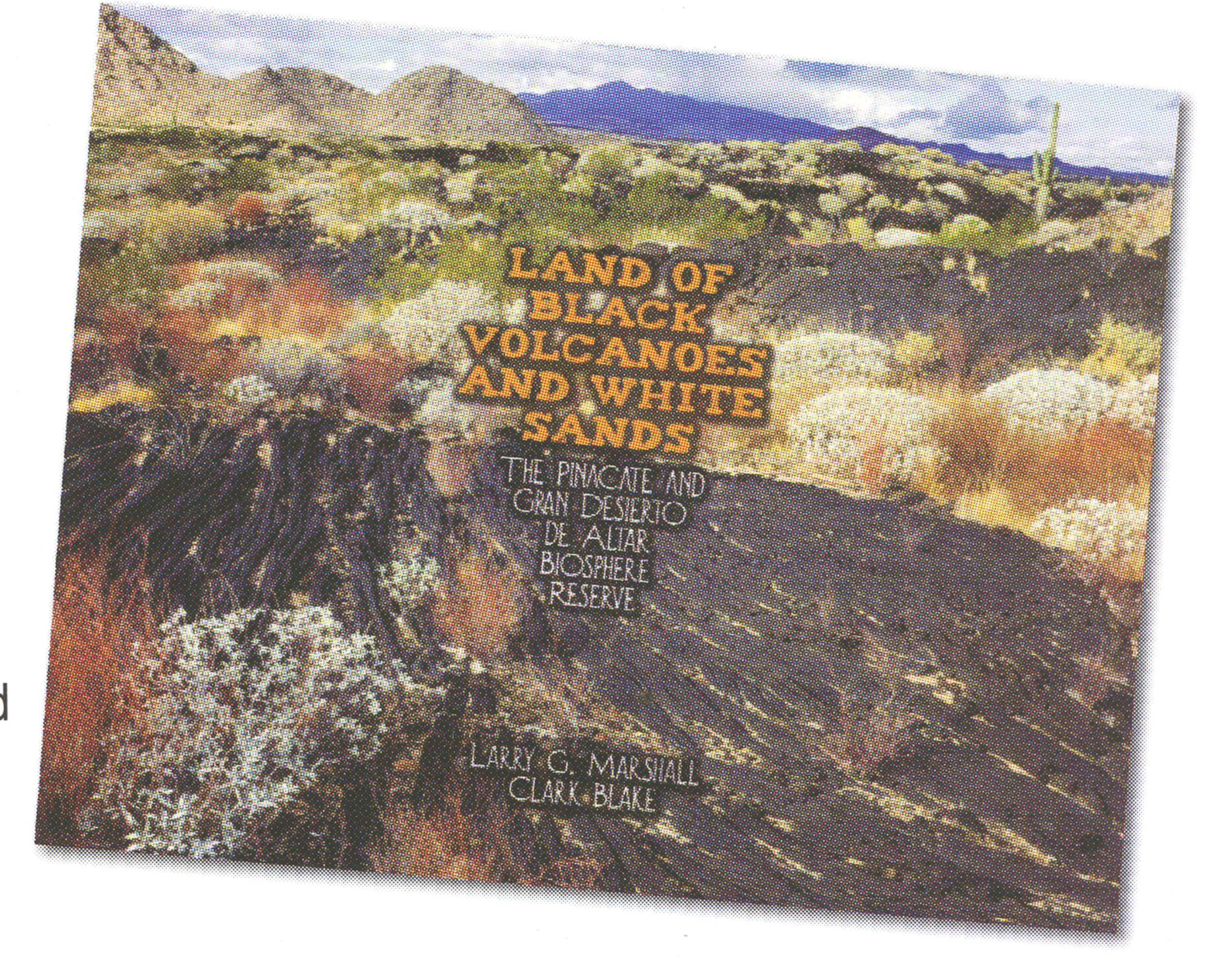
Liz Payne Board Member, Tucson Audubon Society Land of Black Volcanoes and White Sands.
The Pinacate and Gran Desierto de Altar
Biosphere Reserve.

Larry G. Marshall and Clark Blake. 2009.
Environmental Education Exchange, Tucson, AZ
ISBN 978-0-615-28064-6
130 pages. Softcover. \$19.95.
Available at Tucson Audubon Nature Shops

With Land of Black Volcanoes and White Sands,
Drs. Marshall and Blake have created a unique and
beautiful book—both intellectually satisfying and
visually stunning. The authors have traveled and
studied in the two-million-acre El Pinacate and
Gran Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve for
many years. They have both deep knowledge and
deep respect for this beautiful and rugged region.

Given its size and importance, there has been surprisingly little research accomplished in the Pinacate. However, what has been done is succinctly summarized in this book—by two scientists who know how to write for a broad audience. For naturalists, credentialed or casual, the book provides well-organized and easily read summaries of major aspects of the region's natural history—geology, biology, human history, etc. For lovers of the Southwest's most special landscapes, it provides an exceptional portfolio of beautiful and illuminating photographs. In fact, there is no other single place where one can find the El Pinacate captured visually in such a broad and stunning fashion. Included in the book are photos by Bob Sharp, Peter L. Kresan, Francis M. Harty, Paul and Shirley Berquist, and others, including some spectacular panoramic images by Bill Glass. For all of us "old desert rats" who have long explored the region, the book is the fulfillment of a dream: How I wish I had had this book so many years ago, when I first started exploring the magnificent and mysterious coastal region between the border and Puerto Peñasco. As the authors state, "The Pinacate, for many, is the heart and soul of the Sonoran Desert." If you want to explore the natural





history of this "heart and soul," this is the book to start with.

Virtually every aspect of the region's natural history is covered, from pupfish to playas, from sand food to sand dunes, from astronauts to ejidos. For birders who might not yet have ventured this far off the beaten path, the book provides important and useful access information (including new maps) to the Pinacate Reserve. About 240 bird species have been recorded in the reserve, and included among the 100 or so residents are Prairie Falcons, Peregrine Falcons, Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles, and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls. Abundant nectar resources (ocotillo, jícama, honeysuckle, columnar cacti, etc.) draw hundreds of migrant species to the reserve every spring, including Rufous Hummingbirds, and Bullock's and Scott's Orioles.

Naturalists familiar with La Frontera know that El Pinacate is the stuff of legends. From the O'odham salt treks to the coast; to the famous and colorful explorations by Hornaday and Sykes, Ives, Lumholtz, and Julian Hayden; to the Apollo astronaut training sessions—the Pinacate has been a place that draws both by its harshness and its promise of hidden mysteries. The El Pinacate and Gran Desierto Reserve is important for another reason—it was the first of the "large reserves" bordering the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez), and the work that went into its 1993 establishment as a sanctioned biosphere reserve launched a momentum to protect the coastal region of northwestern Mexico that continues to this day. This book does justice to the importance of the reserve, a book that every Southwest naturalist should own—and keep within quick reach!

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