Introduction

*At Home in the Big Woods* is a collection of short essays by a writer with exceptional empathy with wildlife, especially birds, in a unique setting. The Big Woods is part of an area in southeastern Minnesota that escaped the last continental glaciation which covered most of the higher latitudes of North America. A limestone region with a rugged topography unfavorable for agriculture, the Big Woods supports a rich flora and fauna.

In this unique “Driftless Area,” Nancy Overcott and her husband acquired land and established a homestead where they have lived for many years. After a brief survey of the region’s flora and fauna, she tells how she fell in love with its birds and mammals and won their trust. A chickadee alighted on her hand and a deer approached near enough to be touched. At the right time of the year, she could step outside her door and see “yellow-bellied sapsuckers tapping on their favorite elm and ruby-throated hummingbirds frequenting the same trees for sap pooling in the woodpecker holes; walk down my driveway and see waves of migrating warblers, thrushes and sparrows; sit on the banks of the South Fork of the Root River and watch flocks of robins, cedar waxwings, golden-crowned kinglets, ruby-crowned kinglets and yellow-rumped warblers.”

Mrs. Overcott’s human neighbors are not neglected in her book, which tells of the odd ways of some of them. Especially exciting is her account of the elimination of a decaying house by a fire controlled by the Canton Fire Department, and how they saved an old spreading oak tree that rose above the flaming building.

Warm attachment to birds and other creatures endears to us the gifted author of this book. Many of the birds mentioned in it are depicted by attractive black-and-white drawings by Dana Gardner, who has illustrated guides to the birds of a number of South and Central American countries. *At Home in the Big Woods* will be enjoyed by readers who love the woods and its inhabitants as its author does.

- Alexander F. Skutch