

## Local authors share their passion

by Candace Ward

Nothing makes me happier during winter's dark and cold, than cozying up to a good book and a hot mug of cocoa. In light of the Christmas season fast approaching and knowing some of you may be searching for interesting books for the readers on your Christmas list, I would like to share some great books by local Kenai Peninsula authors. These authors have all spent countless hours researching, photographing, and writing about topics for which they have a deep and abiding passion.

Will Troyer, Cooper Landing resident and former manager of the Kenai Moose Range (now the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge), has written three fascinating books with the most recent book *Bear Wrangler* published just this year.

In *Bear Wrangler*, Troyer shares memories of his remarkable career as a pioneering wildlife biologist in Alaska from 1951 – 1982. He worked the length and breadth of Alaska including Kodiak, the Kenai Peninsula, the Aleutians and the Arctic Coast researching bears, moose, sheep, caribou, and migratory birds. He describes the evolution of bear research from the early years trapping bears in large culvert traps and anesthetizing them with buckets of ether to more sophisticated methods of darting them with more effective drugs at close range. His often humorous writing style weaves his professional and personal life into highly entertaining memoir.

Catherine Cassidy and Gary Titus share their fascination with Kenai Peninsula history in *Alaska's No. 1 Guide: The History and Journals of Andrew Berg – 1869 to 1939*. Through their work on Andrew Berg's life, we come to understand "the draw" Alaska inspired for European immigrants seeking a better life, whether the lure was gold, fish, or game.

With the influx of people to the Kenai Peninsula during the 1898 Hope Gold Rush, the area's rich fish and wildlife resources yielded a second "boom" which almost became a "bust" until game laws, registered guides and wardens were established during the

decade of 1910-20. Andrew Berg became Alaska's first registered big game guide in 1910 and later in 1920 an early game warden as well. Through Berg's journals we understand the challenges of living in a wilderness environment where securing food, water and shelter was done "hands on" every day.

Who has not been enthralled by a colorful swallowtail butterfly or Alaska's state insect, the four spotted skimmer dragonfly? Have you ever wondered what a spruce bark beetle really looks like?

Well, now you can find out with Dominique Collet's amazing field guide—*Insects of South-Central Alaska*. Collet's guide is beautifully photographed, extremely well written and organized, and goes way beyond basic insect identification. He includes information on insect anatomy, growth and development, senses, insect guilds, and many other fascinating tidbits about our local insect friends and foes.

*50 Hikes in Alaska's Kenai Peninsula* by Taz Tally is the first comprehensive hiking guide for the Kenai Peninsula. Taz and his dog Zip have hiked hundreds of miles of trails on the Kenai Peninsula multiple times. Taz shares in-depth information on each trail as well as special tips including vista points, wildlife, wildflowers, and geology. Beautiful photographs, helpful maps, and gear tips add to the richness of this book and really make you yearn to get out hiking in our own Kenai Peninsula "wilderness backyard."

To explore these books in more depth, check out our local libraries, book stores in the community, or here at the Refuge Visitor Center's bookstore. Wishing you great "reads" this winter with the adventures of our local authors.

*Candace Ward is a park ranger, who has worked in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Services Program for 25 years. She enjoys learning about the natural and cultural history of the Kenai Peninsula both out in the field and by reading at home in her armchair. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*