THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF WILLIAM BEEBE: EXPLORER AND NATURALIST.
By Carol Grant Gould. Island Press, Washington, D.C. 2004: 447 pp., numerous photos, index. ISBN: 1559638583. $30 (cloth).—In this biography, Carol Grant Gould chronicles the long, productive life of William (Will) Beebe—a man with a driven personality, one who suffered from bouts of depression, but who was usually charming and charismatic—a complicated but insightful person. Gould had at her disposal Beebe’s journals that he wrote from boyhood to old age, and the personal papers of Jocelyn Crane, Beebe’s colleague and companion during Beebe’s later years. These documents, not available to earlier biographers, allowed Gould to present new insights into the life of William Beebe and into the changes in natural history studies and focus that occurred as the Victorian era came to a close and natural history matured during the first half of the twentieth century. Gould describes the scientific aspects of Beebe’s work effectively and handles the difficult personal aspects of his life—such as his estrangement from his first wife—with sensitivity, thus projecting a very credible story of a remarkable ornithologist and natural historian.

The book is divided into four parts: Naturalist, Ornithologist, Marine Biologist, and Tropical Ecologist. Part I, Naturalist, traces Beebe’s life from his birth in 1877 through his formative years as he developed an obsession for all things natural; he collected everything from seashells to stuffed birds while “bugging” and “fossiling” with his friends. He attended Columbia University, where he was mentored by Henry Fairfield Osborn, prepared bird skins, and was sponsored for membership in the American Ornithologists’ Union by Frank Chapman. He eventually left Columbia to take a job tending birds at the new Bronx Zoo.

Part II, Ornithologist, covers Beebe’s early ornithological exploits. In 1904 he married, and his honeymoon consisted of a rugged expedition to Mexico that resulted in the publication of his first book, Two Bird Lovers in Mexico (1905, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts). Beebe became a prolific writer, producing 24 books and hundreds of scientific papers and popular articles. In 1906, he published The Bird: Its Form and Function (Henry Holt, Garden City, New York). Most of his books had at least some focus on birds.

Under Osborn’s mentorship, Beebe became a favorite of the New York Zoological Society, which directed the Bronx Zoo, and through lectures and articles, he became well known to the high society that funded major projects, including scientific expeditions. Beebe also had a strong relationship with the American Museum of Natural History, and became a confidant of Theodore Roosevelt. All this led to funding for a series of expeditions to northern South America, and an expedition around the world to study pheasants for more than a year. That trip culminated in his four volumes: A Monograph of the Pheasants (1918–1922, H. F. Witherby, London, United Kingdom). Other tropical adventures involved establishing a research station in what was then British Guiana, where he collected animals for the Bronx Zoo and conducted research on a broad spectrum of animals and plants. Although his first love was always birds, he was the consummate natural historian. World War I disrupted his adventure in British Guiana, as he trained pilots for the war and eventually flew over the battle zones of France. After the war, he returned to British Guiana to set up another tropical research station under the auspices of the New York Zoological Society.

Part III, Marine Biologist, deals with Beebe’s adventures in marine biology, especially his descent in the bathysphere to more than a half mile below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean near Bermuda. This earned Beebe international notoriety. With Part IV, Tropical Ecologist, we return to an ornithological and more general focus on natural history. During and after World War II, Beebe established several research stations, culminating with Ran-