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FOREWORD

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With unremitting pressure on both North American coasts to satisfy the demands for new marinas and other shore developments, the extent of tidal marshes is continually shrinking. Having grown up and lived adjacent to Connecticut tidal marshes for more than 80 yr, I have watched both their alteration and demise. Despite the relatively small space occupied by tidal marshes, their value as a crucial habitat for a disproportionate number of vertebrate species is attracting increasing attention. How birds, mammals, and reptiles have adapted to exploit this relatively impoverished floral habitat was the focus of a symposium held in October 2002 at the Patuxent National Wildlife Research Center, Patuxent, Maryland.

The collection of twenty papers presented at this gathering is assembled in this volume. The section devoted to avian adaptation to tidal marshes contains a wealth of new research results on how marsh denizens differ from their dry-land interior congeners. We learn how, long ago, they may have split from their more common relatives in order to live in such a dynamic habitat where, twice daily, salty water floods and flows from their territories. A larger part of this volume focuses on the conservation biology of tidal marshes and calls attention to such immediate threats as invading exotic plants, water pollution, drainage and a host of other habitat-modifying forces. A less immediate but still real menace to current tidal marshes is the rising ocean, but if the pace is slow enough, the marshes can retreat to higher ground. Such advances and retreats have been well recorded in the geological record.

This volume fills a crucial gap in our understanding of the dynamics of tidal-marsh vertebrate fauna and, furthermore, devotes a thoughtful concluding paper to an agenda for future research on marsh fauna. The Smithsonian's Migratory Bird Center, The U.S. Geological Survey, and the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service deserve great credit for sponsoring this symposium; its resulting volume assures not only the permanent record of the proceedings but a clear recommendation for future research on the fauna of tidal marshes.