But those who remember such scenes in Orenburg province are now few. Everything has changed. In the whole of our bountiful province there is now not so much as a tenth of the former abundance of game. For what reasons I know not. But, lest any reader should think that this is the fond memory of an old man who thinks that in his youth everything was bigger and better, I can say that unfortunately this is a generally known fact. I do not share the view that the terrible decline is due to a rapid increase in the human population or an increase in the number of fowlers. I shall not attempt to justify myself nor my fellow hunters of that period. In our youth it is true we went in less for hunting than for massacre; but why should there be less and less game with every passing year in areas where nobody shoots at all? And in any case the number of fowlers was always insignificant in proportion to the size of the region. It is clear that there must be other reasons unknown to us. A gradual decline in the number of birds in the province of Orenburg set in long ago, at a time when there was plenty of room for beast, bird, and man. And indeed there is still plenty of room even today.

—S. T. Aksakov, Notes of a Provincial Wildfowler (1852)

In 1847 a Russian landowner named Sergei Aksakov (1791-1859) published a book about fishing Russia’s lakes and streams. Notes on Fishing combined chapters on gear and technique with discussion of fish behavior and habitats, detailed descriptions of gameworthy species, and brief anecdotes drawn from Aksakov’s 50 years of experience as an angler. Readers and critics greeted the book enthusiastically. In 1852 Aksakov followed with a lengthier book on bird hunting in a similar format entitled Notes of a Provincial Wildfowler and in 1855 he published...
the third work in what has come to be viewed as a trilogy: his Stories
and Reminiscences of a Sportsman.¹

Aksakov’s trilogy falls outside the parameters of what we typically
think of as literature. In terms of the spectrum suggested by Thomas
J. Lyon in “A Taxonomy of Nature Writing,” for example, the three
works correspond more readily to the rubric of field guides, with a
substantial admixture from the neighboring categories of natural-his-
tory essays and rambles.² In the context of mid-nineteenth-century
Russia, however, Aksakov’s readers, critics and other writers extolled
his works precisely for their literary merits. In part this reflected his
luminescent style as well as his elegant and precise use of language
and local idiom to describe nature. It also reflected his engaging self-
portrayal as a gentleman hunter whose persona lay on the bedrock of
an intimate relationship with the natural world and who welcomed
his readers to share his enchantment with it. Aksakov’s successful
combination of these attributes in eminently readable prose won over
readers in an age when lyric poets and prose writers in Russia tended
to use elevated and stylized language in describing nature.³

In addition to his literary success Aksakov was welcomed by the
scientific community of his day as a skillful naturalist whose keen
observations had scholarly value. A prominent zoologist and profes-
sor at Moscow University, Karl Rulé (1814-1858), gathered engravings
of fish species for the third edition of Aksakov’s fishing manual and
contributed a closing essay entitled “The Fish’s Upstream Journey.”
Rul’e also created scholarly footnotes for the third edition of Notes of a
Wildfowler.⁴ A half decade before Darwin’s Origin of Species (1859), which
was translated into Russian in 1864, this collaboration between writer
and scientist represented a striking attempt to popularize scientific
analysis of the natural world as well as to explore the commonalities
and differences among various species and their intricate coexistence
and competition within a variety of habitats.⁵

Much scholarship in the burgeoning field of ecocriticism has focused
upon American and West European nature writing. Aksakov’s work
rewards analysis according to many of the same criteria encountered
in such studies: the narrator’s spiritual bond with nature, the ways in
which he observes and describes wild creatures and their habitats, his
emphasis upon the potential of human activities to affect or disrupt
their well-being, the extent to which—in our more ecologically aware
age—we can view a spokesman of the nineteenth century who hunted
voraciously as a proto-conservationist. One can also productively com-
pare Aksakov with contemporaries among western hunter naturalists
such as John James Audubon (1785-1851).
In addition Aksakov’s trilogy provides a valuable opportunity to enrich Western-centered ecocriticism by investigating the different role that one sort of nature writing played in another social, cultural, and political context. In nineteenth-century Russia, and especially during the reactionary regime of Nicholas I (1825-1855), Russian literature served as a primary forum in which crucial issues of identity and affiliation could be worked out. While this is true of any national literature, political repression and strict censorship of non-literary forms of publication meant that Russian literature, even though it was also censored, provided an especially vital forum for criticism of social norms and especially the mores of the social elite. Aksakov’s literary yet factual portrayal of a gentleman hunter, who frankly declared that his primary allegiance lay with nature and who more than once criticized human infringements (including his own) upon the natural world, reflected this self-critical mission, though in a less overt and self-conscious way than does much modern environmentalist literature.

In this article I shall focus upon two different but interrelated issues: the ways in which Aksakov conceptualized and conveyed to his readers in the terms of his day the crucial notions of habitat and ecosystem that have become central to modern conservationist thought, and also recognized their vulnerability to human interference; and secondly, the ambivalence that characterized his self-portrayal as a skillful and sometimes prodigal hunter and fisherman who also cared deeply for nature and his prey. The central question I shall explore is whether he sensed a contradiction between the hunting practices he and his contemporaries employed, on the one hand, and his deep concern for nature and recognition of its fragility on the other. I shall explore these issues primarily through his Notes of a Wildfowler, which lends itself especially well to examining them, while drawing supporting material from his Notes on Fishing and Stories and Reminiscences of a Sportsman.

Aksakov spent most of his boyhood and youth on his family’s country estates at European Russia’s eastern edge near the Ural mountains with occasional sojourns in the provincial capital of Ufa. His father was from an old gentry family and served as a court procurator in Ufa, while his mother was a well-read and intelligent woman of non-gentry origins. He learned to fish and hunt from his father, an avid sportsman, as well as from his personal servant and others among the household and their rural neighbors. In keeping with the norms of the day, he lived separately from his family for long periods even as a child in order to attend first gymnasium and then the newly accredited university in Kazan from 1802-07, although he continued to spend summers in the country. He married in 1816 at the age of 25, eventually fathering six sons and eight daughters. From 1816-1826 he and his growing family
lived on their vast country properties in the Ufa and Orenburg provinces, which were still relatively undeveloped "frontier" regions where ethnic Russians coexisted with various indigenous tribespeople. The Aksakovs then took up residence in Moscow, where Aksakov worked first as a censor (until he was fired from his job in 1832 after permitting publication of a work that satirized tsarist officials), and then as director of the Konstantinovskii Surveyors’ Institute from 1833-38, when he retired from the civil service. In the early 1840s his eyesight began to fail and in 1843 he bought the country estate of Abramtsevo, located 40 miles northeast of Moscow, as he was no longer able to undertake the 700-mile journey to Orenburg. He lived in Moscow and Abramtsevo for the remainder of his life while his health and eyesight continued to deteriorate. There, during the last decade and a half of his life, he dictated his hunting and fishing works and subsequently the autobiographical trilogy for which he is most widely known among Russian readers. 7

Like the younger Turgenev (1818-1883) and Tolstoy (1828-1910), both of whom also hunted—although Tolstoy renounced hunting and became a vegetarian later in life—Aksakov was a privileged member of an elite landowning class for whom it was natural to think of the countryside of his estates (upon his father's death he inherited 850 serfs and several thousand acres) as an extension of himself. Many of his hunting and fishing descriptions reflect a combined sense of stewardship and entitlement—two related and yet conflicting motivations. Enlightened gentry landowners in nineteenth-century Russia tended to feel a sense of stewardship toward their lands and serfs. The prime literary example of this social phenomenon is the protagonist of Tolstoy's novel Anna Karenina (1875-77), Levin, who believes that only through his patriarchal oversight can his land and the peasants who till it thrive. In addition to this sense of responsibility, though, such landowners felt a sense of ownership that is difficult for us to comprehend today. Until serfdom was abolished in 1861 they had extraordinary powers within their domains as local representatives of the system of absolute rule embodied in the tsar, and even after emancipation those among Russia's big rural landowners who lived primarily on their country estates were masters of their surroundings. Aksakov sometimes hunted and fished on lands other than his own, and the Russian gentry did not guard its hunting rights as rigidly as did the English aristocracy, but I believe that this sense of personal identification with his natural surroundings carried over into his overall outlook as a hunter and fisherman. 8

Living on the eastern edge of European Russia early in the nineteenth century, Aksakov hunted and fished amidst large populations of migratory and native birds and other animals as well as relatively
unspoiled river systems teeming with fish. His writing is pervaded by a sense of awe at this natural wealth, combined with a rigorous determination to describe nature's bounty in a way that does justice to its variety, beauty, complexity, and potential fragility. Aksakov uses two different organizational schemes in his works on fishing and bird hunting, respectively. In the angling work he simply groups species into three categories: small, large but rarely predatory, and predatory. His later and lengthier bird-hunting book divides species instead according to the more ecologically oriented criterion of primary habitat: wetlands, open waterways, grassland, and forest. Aksakov of course does not use the modern Russian term for habitat, which is "estestvennaia sreda" (literally, "natural environment"). Rather, he uses the phrase "mesto zhitel'stv" ("place of habitation"). His lengthy descriptions in both books of appropriate habitat for various species and the interrelations between the flora and fauna that coexist in these habitats, however, make it clear that he was aware of some of the types of interdependence that characterize modern thinking about ecosystems, as well as the dangers that humans can pose to these fragile environments.

His eight-page introduction to woodlands, home of such prized gamebirds as grouse and woodcock, encapsulates this ecological aspect of Aksakov's thinking. In addition to describing the cycle of death and renewal in the succession of tree species, and their varying value as habitat for assorted species of birds and animals, Aksakov focuses upon the interdependence of trees and water rather than simply emphasizing the more obvious need of trees for moisture. He then expresses concern about logging's potential to disrupt Russia's waterways:

Another of nature's great purposes may be seen in the combination of woodland and water: the forest is the guardian of the water. The trees shield the ground against the searing rays of the summer sun and from the drying power of the wind. Cool and dampness thrive in their shadow, in which flowing or standing water cannot dry out. The falling water levels of rivers, which has been seen throughout Russia, is generally thought to result from the destruction of forests. (213)

Later in his discussion of woodlands, Aksakov elaborates upon the need for Russians to treat their forest resources more responsibly:

These woodlands, which I have described so superficially and inadequately, this jewel of nature, this cool haven in hot weather, this home of animals and birds, these woodlands that provide timber for our houses and fuel in our long harsh winters, are treated by us with the utmost extravagance. We are rich in forests, but the very abundance makes us so wasteful that poverty is but a step away. We think nothing of felling a tree for no reason. It may be true that in the truly forest
provinces, the sparse human population could not destroy the forest even if it wished to, but in many other places where forests once stood we now have open steppes and straw has replaced timber. This may yet be the fate of the province of Orenburg. (219-20)

In his angling book, perhaps because wetlands and waterways are among the first natural environments to reveal the effects of human interference and pollution and often do so in readily observable ways, Aksakov provides detailed analysis of the specific processes through which agriculture and other human activities impact waterways. Together, these passages demonstrate a pattern of close observation of water systems over decades. Here, in a passage which also reveals the lyrical aspect of his writing that won over readers, he describes the effects of building a mill upon a river:

When the first mill is built on a wild, clean, free river, and the water is impounded with a dam of fresh brushwood and earth, topped with several layers of turf turned up by the plow, then spottie, redling, and grayling will live in this clean pond, which is clear as glass during the dam’s first few years. Such a pond can be wondrously handsome! This is especially so in calm weather, at sunrise and sunset, when the flashing mirror of the water lies still, like an enormous piece of ice, between its green, darkened banks.... in such a pond, far from human habitation, where it’s too far to cart dung and the dam is supported only by turf and soil, these three splendid species of trout may live for a long time. But the brushwood will rot through, the dam will settle, and dung will accumulate in the mill-yard because the plowed fields are not being fertilized and there is nowhere else to put it. At that time, dung (even from the village if the dam isn’t too remote) will start being dumped onto the dam, which will communicate its odor to the water. Spottie will cease to live in the pond, and will move upriver, while grayling will remain in the pond for awhile. But when the water becomes even more polluted, the grayling too will disappear. (139-40)

Here, as elsewhere in his angling book, Aksakov links declining local fish populations directly with habitat degradation, which he describes in precise and analytical terms. In the other two works of his trilog—reflecting his general principle of only attesting to phenomena that he has witnessed and can explain—offers far less certainty about the reasons underlying this decline. In Notes and Reminiscences of a Sportsman he provides ten pages that meticulously document the spring arrival of migratory birds from 1811 to 1826 by species and exact date (IV, 504-15). Yet, while this provides something of a documentary basis for his overall sense that bird populations have fallen, he hazards no
explanation. Rather, he resorts to nostalgic pronouncements about an
Edenic past in which birds were more numerous, as in this passage:

I must turn to history to throw a broader light on spring migration
in Orenburg province in the past, which now seems fabulous. Birds
were so numerous that all the marshes, water meadows, pond fringes,
plowed fields, valleys, and gullies with their spring freshets were
covered with them. "The air groaned" (as the peasants say) with their
varied calls, cries, whistles, and the rush of their wings slicing the air
in every direction. Even at night with the windows closed, the ardent
hunter would be prevented from sleeping. (9)

Aksakov's most direct attempt to link a decline in bird popula-
tion with human activities occurs in his condemnation of "controlled
burns" in the steppe (this custom prevailed among both Russian set-
tlers and the natives of the Orenburg region, where it was part of the
yearly agricultural cycle). He considers it a "deleterious practice" that
"causes dreadful damage to the bird life of the steppe," particularly as
it occurs during nesting season (173). At the same time he describes the
rejuvenated appearance of the grasslands shortly after these fires and
stops short of attributing the decline of entire species to them.

As a group these quotes should make it clear that Aksakov was both
knowledgeable and concerned about environmental factors affecting
the well-being of prey populations, although he was constrained by
his restricted ability to gather accurate information and the limited
sophistication of scientific discourse about the environment in his day.
He also bemoaned human activities that caused large-scale harm to the
species that he fished and hunted and to their habitats. How then did
he represent the effects of hunting upon these same species? Did he
recognize that hunting could pose its own dangers to their survival?
Did he consider certain types of hunting to be overly destructive or
simply ignoble? Did he have a hunting "ethic" and if so what were its
central tenets?

Aksakov portrays himself as a gentleman hunter with a naturalist's
determination to understand his prey. His motivation to hunt does not
derive primarily from the fact that his prey is edible—although he ap-
parently almost always kept or passed on to others the birds and fish
he killed, and frequently refers to the taste and best ways of preparing
various species—but from his desire to test his skill and increase his
knowledge of nature and animal behavior. He frequently dissected
birds and fish in order to learn about their diets and anatomy, for ex-
ample, and took detailed notes on unusual specimens. In this respect
Aksakov bears a distinct resemblance to John James Audubon, who
wrote of the epiphany he experienced as both an avid hunter and a
wildlife artist when he realized that the only way to draw birds in a realistic way was to use wire to rig those he had just shot himself into natural poses before they stiffened. Both men—the self-styled American woodsman naturalist and the Russian landowner—exemplify the fact that hunting provided one of the cultural mechanisms through which the sciences of zoology, biology, and eventually ecology developed. Richard Rhodes' explanation of our modern discomfort at the apparent contradictions in Audubon's worldview applies equally to Aksakov: "Audubon engaged birds with the intensity (and sometimes the ferocity) of a hunter because hunting was the cultural frame out of which his encounter with birds emerged [...] Much of what seems contradictory in his narratives—learning birds, studying birds, concerning himself with their population dynamics and stresses but also killing birds for food and for sport, sometimes in great numbers—follows from this fact" (75).15

A good deal of Aksakov's own hunting ethic can be sensed indirectly through his criticism of those who hunt differently. He takes pains to differentiate himself from men who are primarily interested in hunting as a source of food, on the one hand, and from commercial hunters, on the other. Explaining his disdain for goose hunting, he writes:

To tell the truth, one shoots wild geese less for the sport of it than for the table, and the fowler whose sport is the noble marshland wader can have little time for them. Geese must usually be stalked; sometimes you have to crawl on the ground to get near them, or lie in wait for them to fly over. None of this is to the liking of the true sportsman: it is not so much skill with the gun that is required, but rather much patience and stamina. I went in for this only in my youth, when I was guided by older hands who could not hit snipe, which they in any case spurned on account of its size, as they judged their game by weight. True sportsmen do not go after geese, although they will, of course, shoot them with pleasure when the chance presents itself. (104)

In part these sentiments reflect the class prejudices that were so ingrained in nineteenth-century Russian society. The older hands to which Aksakov refers may well be those of his manservant, whose fishing technique he criticizes in a similar vein in his autobiographical writing. Aksakov's true disdain, however, is reserved for the commercial hunters who service the urban markets with fish and birds that they have netted or shot. He writes:

I shall not dwell on the devastating commercial hunting practiced by Moscow and Petersburg merchants: To me, as to all true wildfowlers, it is repugnant. I shall only say that they are highly skilled in decoying
and killing all kinds of game, even including hares. Their main prey consists of coveys of black grouse, hazel grouse, and willow grouse; first they lure the mother, using the call of the chick, then exterminate all the chicks by luring them to the call of the mother. (243)

Aksakov uses the same word to lament the effects of commercial grouse hunting that he employed to bewail the harm inflicted by the burning of the Orenburg steppes: both have “devastating” (“istrebitel’nyi,” IV, 412) consequences for birdlife. He next questions how the populations of such sought-after species as black grouse can withstand these depredations and concludes: “One must remember the vastness of Russia and its limitless forests” (244). His rejection of commercial hunting gains additional emotional resonance through the illustration he provides, which portrays the merchants as shamelessly exploiting both the maternal instincts of the mother and the trusting and dependent nature of the chicks.

Aksakov’s strong criticism of commercial hunting and his concern over its effects on bird populations might imply that he would show commensurate restraint as a sporting hunter. In fact, the picture is more complicated. Aksakov relates a number of instances in which he and other gentleman wildfowlers killed extraordinarily large numbers of birds on individual hunts or over a short period of time. He recalls, for example, that it used to be possible to shoot 300 grouse in a season and notes that between mid-September and early December of 1816 he shot about 500 grouse (301).17 He also tells of occasions when he simply could not restrain himself from firing on flocks of birds while traveling the countryside in his carriage: “I would shoot so many curlew that I had nowhere to put them, and, not knowing what to do with them, I kept vowing to myself not to stop, not to get out, and not to shoot... But then a new flock would descend on me, bigger and bolder than the last—and again they fell to my shots” (175). In another case he expresses regret over his participation as a young man in shooting male great snipe at night on their display grounds because “one injures more birds than one kills outright” and many of the wounded escape (33). Not only does Aksakov confess to such large-scale killing but—problematically, from a modern conservationist perspective—rarity ranks alongside beauty, taste, and elusiveness as one of the paramount qualities of a gameworthy species of bird.

At the same time, Aksakov explicitly promotes a set of principles meant to guide the enlightened wildfowler. He stresses repeatedly, for example, that wounded birds should be tracked down and dispatched. After killing three cranes as they walked across a harvested field he tells of tracking down a fourth who had been wounded and had flown off, and finding it only toward evening in a marshy thicket miles away with
the help of his dog (161-62). He describes for his readers the signs that indicate a grouse has been wounded and adds: "If any of these signs are observed you must follow the injured bird and finish it off" (225). He relates that once, while collecting little bustard’s eggs, he accidentally trod upon a female with his hobnail boots and describes how he treated her superficial wounds with some pitch from the wheels of his carriage and then released her (166). In addition to such explicit guidelines and examples, Aksakov’s self-representation as a naturalist who finds bird behavior mesmerizing and who depicts his hunting as part of his larger quest to understand birds carries an implicit message that wildlife has value in and of itself. Some particularly interesting textual moments occur when his dual roles as hunter and naturalist appear to conflict. Speaking of his beloved species of “little stints,” he writes:

I have always been so fond of these tiny stints that sometimes it has seemed a pity to shoot them. When I have had the opportunity to steal up on a flock unobserved and watch them running about without a care, finding food in the mud and sometimes stopping to rest, I have observed them in admiration for long periods, and occasionally even stolen away again without firing a shot [...] And these birds are keenly sought by the passionate hunter! (69-70)

Do the apparent tensions and even contradictions between Aksakov’s varying stances that I have been teasing out say more about the viewpoints and priorities of this modern reader than about Aksakov himself? Was he simply a man of his times, as Rhodes argues Audubon was: an avid hunter who lived amidst such a plethora of wildlife that he did not believe he and his peers could possibly inflict significant damage upon prey species? The epigraph to this article broaches some of these issues but provides only incomplete and contradictory answers. On the one hand, Aksakov claims that less than a tenth of the former amount of game remains in the province of Orenburg. He also expresses regret over the tendency of the young men of his generation to engage in “massacre”: “I shall not attempt to justify myself nor my fellow hunters of that period,” he writes (10). On the other hand, he refuses to attribute dwindling bird populations to hunting and finishes by claiming that there is more than enough room for men and animals to coexist even at the present time. It’s certainly tempting for the modern reader to conclude that these conflicting statements stem as much from his own repressed feelings of guilt as from an objective analysis of the situation.

A clearer understanding of Aksakov’s views may emerge from examining another passage in which he seems to be overcome by a rheto-
ric of ambivalence. Here he describes in detail one of the very scenes of massacre to which the epigraph alludes in more general terms:

I recall with sadness the massacre of birds that I, like all other fowlers, was responsible for in the vast marshes of Orenburg, teeming with all manner of game, chiefly godwits, which stand out among waders by their unusual determination in the defense of their young. These ravages are all the more devastating when the birds are incubating. In this way whole generations are exterminated. [...] As soon as the hunter comes anywhere near a nesting colony, one or two birds will fly out to meet the intruder, sometimes as far as two furlongs away. We used to jokingly call them "messengers." [...] As the fowler strikes out onto the marsh, and if he happens to approach a nest site or some fledglings hiding in the grass, the parents fly closer and closer to him, with pitiful cries, whirling over his head, mobbing him, so close as to almost touch the muzzle of his gun. [...] Shooting black-tailed godwits in flight at this time, once you can remain calm, is easier than shooting sitting birds: you let them fly off a certain distance and avoid firing when they're turning sharply. This situation usually results in a marsh that hours before teemed with noisy bird life and rang with their bright calls being turned into a still and lifeless place. Only slightly injured godwits, and those that were scared off in time, sit silently watching from afar, waiting for the destroyer to leave, so that they can hurry back to their nests. [...] But no such thoughts enter the fowler's head: he cheerfully gathers his booty, counts the bodies, and heads for the next marsh. (44-45)

The key to interpreting this passage is to remember that Aksakov dictated his nature trilogy as an older man, growing infirm and near blind, looking back upon his life. In addition he saw the trilogy as an opportunity not only to entertain but to educate his readers, who ranged from hunters like himself to the general public, and to inculcate the values he had learned during a lifetime of hunting and observing nature. The relationship between the older and wiser narrator telling of his life retrospectively and his younger self—as well as the readership of whom Aksakov had been made so aware by the enthusiastic reception of his first work on fishing—helps to decipher some of the rhetorical strategies he deploys in the passage. The older Aksakov recalls his youthful transgressions against nature with "sadness." At the same time he links his own behavior with the trespasses of an entire earlier generation of hunters who without exception in his portrayal carried out such massacres ("I, like all other fowlers [...]”). In a certain sense this exculpates him of individual responsibility. At the same time, though, it underlines the extent of destruction, which resulted in the extermination of "entire generations" of birds. His juxtaposition of the desperate godwits as they attempt to defend their nestlings and
the ruthless hunters, who find the birds’ plight amusing, culminates in his portrayal of the “still and lifeless” scene as the wounded and frightened godwits that remain await the departure of the “destroyer” so that they can return to their nests while the fowler “cheerfully gathers his booty, counts the bodies, and heads for the next marsh,” oblivious to the wrong he has committed. If “no such thoughts enter the fowler’s head,” they certainly have entered the head of the older Aksakov and he shares them with his reader.

Throughout the trilogy the interrelationship between Aksakov’s present perspectives and his actions and attitudes as a younger man provides much of the dynamism of his self-representation as a sportsman and observer of nature. The resulting text is richly reverberant, which may account for its ability to inspire readers even today. His successful modulation between presenting his personal viewpoints and experiences and describing nature in an expository way proved so attractive to readers that his trilogy ultimately had an enormous impact upon his contemporaries’ perception of nature, its role in an individual’s life, and even the ways in which animals and their natural environments were portrayed in more conventional literary works that followed. It has become almost a truism among those who study Aksakov that his oeuvre merits greater attention than it has received, but his autobiographical writings have tended to garner the lion’s share of recent scholarly interest. Clearly his nature trilogy also merits our renewed scrutiny and deserves to play a central role as we bring ecocritical perspectives to bear upon Russia’s nature writing tradition.

Notes

1. The three works are included in the four-volume scholarly edition of Aksakov’s oeuvre edited by S. Mashinskii. The first two have recently been translated by Thomas P. Hodge and Kevin Windle, respectively. I will quote from these translations when possible; all other translations are my own.

2. Lyon argues that the relative emphasis placed upon “natural history information, personal responses to nature, and philosophical interpretation of nature [...] determines all the permutations and categories within the field” of nature writing (276). Aksakov generally maintains an expository tone but in certain passages he waxes both lyrical and personal.

3. For a survey of readers’ reactions to Aksakov’s works see Mashinskii, S. T. Aksakov (312-15, 330-32, 349-50) and Hodge (xv-xxii).

4. Both Mashinskii (339-41) and Hodge (xiv) discuss the collaboration, with Hodge observing that Rul’e’s notes, ironically, contained a number of errors that were corrected only by the ichthyologist N. A. Varpakhovskii in his revised notes to the 1886 edition of Aksakov’s collected works.
5. Mashinskii relates that one of Rul’e’s students remarked after reading the translated *Origin of Species*: “This book wasn’t exactly the same as what Karl Frantsevich [Rul’e] had taught us, but was so close, so related, that the new teaching seemed something long familiar [...]” (336). For a study of the Russian reception of Darwin that emphasizes Russian intellectuals’ discomfort with Malthusian aspects of Darwinism see Daniel P. Todes, *Darwin Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought*.

6. In this context it’s interesting to note that a poetic epigraph by Aksakov that contains the lines “I venture into nature’s world/The world of serenity and freedom” was considered by the censor too provocative to be included in the first edition of his fishing guide, although it was permitted in the second edition of 1854. See Hodge, xii, for further discussion of this.

7. This general biographical survey draws upon Mashinskii, Hodge, and Durkin, *Sergei Aksakov and Russian Pastoral* (especially 8-22).

8. Orlando Figes argues in *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* that Russian hunting was of two sorts: the grand hunt on horseback with packs of dogs, which resembled the fox hunts of England; and a “distinctly Russian” rural odyssey in which gentlemen and commoners (even serfs) interacted as hunters in a surprisingly egalitarian way (107). Aksakov’s works, as well as Ivan Turgenev’s famed *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album* (1852), provide a number of examples of this egalitarian mode of hunting. For a summary of Russian hunting laws that situates them in a European context see “Okhota” [Hunting] in the 86-volume *Brokgauz i Efron entsiklopediia* (originally published in 1890-1902).

9. He uses this phrase both in introducing his system of classification (S. T. Aksakov, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected Works], IV, 175) and throughout his descriptions of individual species.

10. To my knowledge the closest previous approach to discussing Aksakov’s views from an explicitly ecological perspective occurs in Tom Newlin’s thoughtful 2003 article “At the Bottom of the River.” Newlin briefly compares Turgenev’s and Aksakov’s views on habitat destruction and natural equilibrium, notes that “Aksakov himself had a detailed and ecologically holistic appreciation of marshlands by the 1840s” (89), and alludes to passages that demonstrate Aksakov’s regret over wanton hunting practices (81, 89).

11. Aksakov follows up this passage with a footnote in which he describes the fate of a village that cut the trees surrounding the headwaters of the local water source. Within a year the stream had dried up and it resumed flowing only 10 years later (299). Aksakov’s concern predates that of authors whose awareness of deforestation is more widely recognized. Anton Chekhov has traditionally been viewed as the nineteenth-century Russian author most preoccupied with deforestation, largely on the strength of the compelling character Dr. Astrov, who compiles maps of deforestation in European Russia, in his play *Uncle Vanya* (1896). In his much lesser known autobiographical work, *Journey to Sakhalin* (1895), Chekhov echoes Aksakov’s concerns of 40 years earlier in a number of passages detailing the effects of deforestation. In one example he notes that Sakhalin’s inhabitants had been able to fish for salmon until recently in the Arkay river “but now, as a consequence of forest fires and tree-felling, it has grown shallow, and, towards the summer, dries up completely” (142). For a superb and wide-ranging treatment of deforestation as a topos in nineteenth-
century Russian culture see Jane Costlow, “Imaginations of Destruction: The “Forest Question” in Nineteenth-Century Russian Culture.”

12. Hodge notes that one of Aksakov’s few obvious errors in his fishing book involves his assertion that grayling are a species of trout, xxvii.

13. Durkin discusses Aksakov’s hunterly persona and his hunting and fishing works as literature (66-88), focusing especially upon the “transposition of the pattern of the hunt itself into the structure and style of the text” (75). Mashinskii, 317-18, stresses that hunting was not a simple pastime for Aksakov but a passionate engagement with nature that enlisted his powers of intellect, as well as his senses, in the quest to outwit his prey.

14. See Audubon’s “Account of the Method of Drawing Birds” (753-58) and “My Style of Drawing Birds” (759-64) in his Writings and Drawings.

15. For a recent treatment of hunting as a focal point of American culture from colonial times to the twentieth century see Daniel Justin Herman, Hunting and the American Imagination. Herman discusses Audubon briefly, noting the tensions implicit in his role as a hunter and naturalist and in his varying depictions of birds, which ranged from the “masculine and martial” to the “sentimental and domestic” (164).

16. Interestingly enough, Aksakov was not equally dismissive of the subsistence hunting practiced by native tribespeople, whose tracking abilities and marksmanship he admired. Perhaps this reflects the fact that they were truly foreign, rather than members of his own society and his social inferiors. For a discussion of hunting among the natives of Siberia and their exploitation in the service of Russia’s fur trade see James Forsyth, A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia’s North Asian Colony, 1581-1990.

17. Durkin provides complementary figures (68-69), noting that Aksakov recorded killing 898 birds in 1813 and that family records indicate approximately 1500 fish were caught each year at Abramtsevo from 1845-47.

18. Andrew Baruch Wachtel, in his chapter on the childhood portion of Aksakov’s autobiographical trilogy, describes the varying relationships between the narrator, his younger self, and the author Aksakov as a “complex pattern of voices” (173) in a way that has informed my reading of Aksakov’s self-representation in the nature trilogy. See The Battle for Childhood, 58-82.

References


