

BOOK REVIEWS



Birds of Hamilton and Surrounding Areas. 2006. *Robert Curry and the Hamilton Naturalists Club.* Publ. by the Hamilton Naturalists Club.

Hardcover, 690 pages, frontpiece and 32 colour plates, 178 black and white photos, drawings and paintings, 12 maps, 22 x 28cm. \$70 Canadian. ISBN 0-9732488-8-2.

The Hamilton area is a part of the province with a wide variety of habitats, many remaining significant natural areas, including a large section of the Niagara Escarpment, and a long history of active birding. Indeed, it has "the most detailed evidence of the status of birds over the past 150 years in Ontario". This is a welcome and long awaited addition to the literature on the avifauna of the province, and I looked forward to an informative and detailed compilation about the Hamilton area. I was not disappointed.

The book begins with a foreword by Fred Bodsworth; an overview of the history and relevance of the birding activity of the area, and some background on the principal author of the book and

some of his predecessors. Then, Lois Evans provides a historical overview of "birding" in the Hamilton area. This begins with the earliest archaeological evidence for birds, and the earliest written records. It contains information on the first early serious recorders, to present day activities, and many of the fascinating persons involved along the way.

A detailed section on birding hotspots in and around Hamilton is compiled by Rob Dobos. This section is nicely complimented by maps, easily accessed inside the back cover of the book. An overview of the movements and activities of birds through the calendar year follows by Bob Curry, along with information on the average temperatures and rainfall/snowfall for each month. In another chapter Curry presents the changing environment of the Hamilton study area and the various species that have been, and continue to be influenced by ongoing alterations in the name of progress. Lists of the most obviously affected species and some of the reasons for the increases and declines are given.

The bulk of the book (366 pages) is concerned with the 389 species accounts prepared by Bob Curry. For

each account there is a summary of the occurrence and abundance for each appropriate season, set apart from the text, for a very useful quick reference. This summary also includes the number of records for rarer species, breeding status, record high counts, and extreme dates of occurrence where appropriate. The large volume of data available over many years has allowed the author to provide 12 categories to indicate the occurrence status of birds. I suspect many will find this an overly fine division to try to remember. For abundance status and breeding distribution status a more manageable five categories are used.

For all but permanent residents there is also a summary of occurrence dates for each account. Set clearly apart from the body of the text this provides median and extreme arrival and departure dates where appropriate.

The information on the seasonal occurrence of all species together is also summarized in seasonal bar graph form, prepared by Sheldon McGregor. These graphs are located at the back of the book, for ease of access. Breeding and distribution status are also included with the graphs, overall a most useful addition to the book.

The text of the species accounts begin with some interesting items gleaned from various literature sources, and may summarize the wider range of the species. The status for each is described through various time periods:

archaeological evidence if available, the late 19th century, the early, and late 20th century. For migratory species greater detail of the passage is presented, and for breeding species, atlas and nesting information compliments a discussion of breeding status. For rarer species details of some or all of the occurrences are presented. Maps inside both the front and back covers help locate places mentioned in the text. More detail on one or more on these maps, however, would have been helpful in locating some of the places referred to in various accounts.

The decision to include or exclude any particular species or record is the decision of the author. His decisions have been made after consultation with other knowledgeable persons, and consideration of the available evidence. His reasons for inclusion or exclusion have been explained. They are generally conservative and reasonable decisions. The accounts seemed carefully researched and filled with interesting and useful information.

Following the species accounts, the activities of the Hamilton Naturalists Club are further highlighted by 16 additional chapters. Bruce Duncan recounts Bald Eagle hacking to assist in the restoration efforts in southern Ontario. Brian Wylie looks at more than 50 years of a Wood Duck nest box program. Bill Read gives a history of the Eastern Bluebird populations in the area.

Don Wills and Kim Barrett discuss efforts on behalf of the endangered Prothonotary Warbler. Bev Kingdon outlines Hamilton area activities contributing to the Trumpeter Swan reintroduction to Ontario. Audrey Gamble and Mike Street celebrate the efforts to reintroduce Peregrine Falcons, and provide key details of the successes in Hamilton. Mike Street outlines the history of the Grimsby Hawkwatch, and provides the statistics for 30 years of counting.

Ralph Morris presents the history and details of many university studies undertaken with colonial waterbirds nesting in the Hamilton Harbour over 35 years. Chip Weseloh further explores the effects of contaminants on population levels of waterbirds in the harbour from government funded studies over 35 years. The effects of these complimentary studies give considerable cause for concern to the human population living in the harbour area.

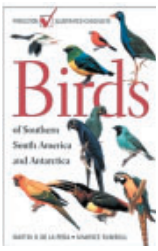
The Hamilton Fall Bird Count is outlined by Bill Lamond, with results and highlights from those counts. The data from the Hamilton Christmas Bird Counts since 1921 are presented by Ian Richards. Mark Chojnacki covers the Peel-Halton section of Christmas Bird Counts since 1963. The Midwinter Waterfowl Census is discussed by George Naylor. George Bryant reviews the situation with Lake Ontario pelagic species. Phil Waggett presents a nostalgic look at some egg collecting. And finally, David Brewer

and John Miles detail the efforts and results of bird-banding, mainly since 1957.

The book cover and a frontpiece are from a fine painting by Robert Bateman. There are two groups of colour plates: The first 16 (27 photos, a map and a painting) are selected habitats and some birding highlights. These are superb photos from several sources. The second 16 (82 photos) illustrate some of the rare and uncommon birds of the Hamilton area. While I found the placement of the plates somewhat awkward, within the text of chapters, they are a beautiful addition to the book. The numerous black and white photos, drawings, and paintings that compliment the text through the book are also a very pleasing addition. Short biographies of the contributors, an index to species accounts, and the latest addition to the Hamilton area bird list conclude the book.

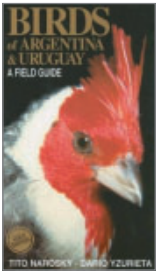
The Birds of Hamilton is a monument to a huge cooperative effort by a dedicated group of birding enthusiasts. It is an achievement that deserves to be on the shelves of all people interested in birds of Hamilton and the wider provincial scene.

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Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica. 1998.

Martin R. de la Peña.
Princeton University Press. 304 pages,
19 x 12.5 cm. \$29.95 US.
ISBN 0-691-09035-1.



Birds of Argentina & Uruguay: A Field Guide. 2003.

Tito Narosky – Dario Yzurieta. 15th edition,
Vazquez Mazzini Editores. 346 pages,
23 x 12 cm. \$43.25.
ISBN 987-9132-05-X.

Argentina provides a good introduction to South America, because the bird list is varied but not overwhelming, the infrastructure is good, and after the devaluations a few years ago, accommodation and food are very cheap.

Two guides derived from original works in Spanish are available and both are portable for use in the field. De la Peña's guide is derived from a more extensive work that included information about nest, eggs and other material, but the birds included have been extended to include birds from surrounding countries in the southern cone. It is similar in format to other Princeton/Collins guides of the 1990s with descriptions on the pages that face the plates, followed by black-and-white plates of raptors in flight, and distribu-

tion maps collected at the back. This separation of information makes the guide harder to use, particularly for visitors who need to check distribution carefully.

Narosky's guide is a translation of the original Spanish version, and in the 15th "golden edition" the guide has been reworked, although most of the drawings are those of the late Dario Yzurieta. Descriptions, illustrations and distribution maps appear together, which facilitates use once a possible identification has been made. Finding families of birds, however, is made difficult by an index that alphabetizes using the first part of the common name rather than family name. There is an excellent section on the ornithogeographic zones of Argentina that provides a map, description of zones and the types of birds one may expect to find in each. Similarly there is a section that provides short descriptions of families, their usual behavior and habitat, and a sketch of their shape. Both of these sections are valuable for the first-time visitor. Of less value, because of its brevity, is a map and list of 100 localities for bird-watching.

The illustrations in de la Peña are cleaner and generally more useful, although the shading often appears darker than the observed bird. In the depiction of the Lineated Woodpecker, for example, the red malar stripe and the face and throat markings are clearly shown, whereas they are unclear in Narosky. The illustrations in Narosky

are more muted in color, although in the case of the ovenbirds and allies, they are often closer to what one sees. The sea and shore-birds in de la Peña are shown in flight, but most others are shown perched or standing, whereas Narosky often shows birds both in environment and flying. This is clearly an advantage for species such as the White-eyed Parrot, which shows red shoulders and underwing coverts in flight, and the black-tyrants and the siskins, which have distinctive wing patterns in flight.

The descriptions in de la Peña are more complete, whereas Narosky focuses on supplementing the drawings and this frees up space for characteristic features that might not appear in a traditional description. For example, under Scaly Parrot he notes “Flapping from body line downward, with wings nearly touching”; this was indeed the only parrot we saw flying in that manner.

Both guides use common names that may not be universally recognized; both refer to Bay-winged Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*), which is more familiar to North American birders as Harris’s Hawk. Some species may have different common names; *Cinclodes comechingonus* appears as Sierran Cinclodes in Narosky and Chestnut-winged Cinclodes in de la Peña. Splits and lumping of species vary also; Orlong’s and Gray-flanked Cinclodes in Narosky appear as only Gray-flanked Cinclodes in de la Peña. This means

that one needs to check the final list of sightings against the standard world list one normally uses.

The two guides complement each other, and ideally one should have both on a trip. If forced to choose one, I would select de la Peña for its illustrations and complete descriptions. An option for those wishing to save money would be to buy de la Peña in advance and buy Narosky in Argentina, where it was on sale at the airport and in downtown Buenos Aires at a lower price than one would pay here.

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