

## Book Reviews

*A Field Guide to Advanced Birding*. 1990. By Kenn Kaufman. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. xiv + 299 pp., illustrated. U.S. \$22.95

Aptly subtitled "Birding Challenges and How to Approach Them", this book is the latest in the acclaimed Peterson Field Guide series, published by Houghton Mifflin of Boston. The author, well known for his identification pieces in journals such as *American Birds* and *Birding*, has compiled an assortment of the most perplexing field problems facing birders in North America, presenting them in a handy field guide format.

Chapter 1, "Challenges in Birding and How to Approach Them", serves as the introduction. Kaufman outlines the purpose of the book, and summarizes the basic rules of field identification, stressing the cautious approach to birding. He concludes the chapter with a richly diagrammed "Terminology and Bird Topography". This chapter is a good set up for what is to follow and makes interesting reading for birders of any level of experience. Chapters 2 to 35 are the heart of the book, delving into, in phylogenetic order, difficult problems not covered in a comparative sense by any standard field guide. The author presents the problem, discusses preliminary field characters, dissects the problem, and summarizes the key points. Problems involve two species situations such as "The Western Grebe Complex" and "The Dark Ibises", three or four as in "The Accipiters" and "The Medium-sized Terns", all the way up to multiple species, the dreaded "Empidonax Flycatchers". Several chapters take a generalized "how to" approach,

discussing basic fundamentals of identification of shorebirds, gulls, fall warblers and sparrows. Kaufman provides all of the illustrations and the text for every chapter except for "The Dowitchers" and "The Thayer's Gull Complex", handled by Claudia Wilds and Kevin J. Zimmer, respectively. For further reading, an extensive bibliography completes the book.

I will start out by saying that this is an excellent book, one that the "keeners" have long anticipated, as it neatly brings together a significant number of concerns that have always troubled birders on the continent. What I found to be particularly delightful is that essentially every chapter in the book is of at least moderate relevance to Ontario birders. Most of the chapters are of prime interest to us. Of course, many people can think of problems which are not dealt with in the book, but the author acknowledges this in the early stages. Furthermore, all that is needed to rectify this is either an enlarged second edition or a Volume II. In the interests of constructive criticism, however, I'll nominate four quandaries not examined: female Barrow's vs. Common Goldeneye; immature Broad-winged Hawk vs. Red-shouldered Hawk; Rock vs. Willow Ptarmigan; and Eastern vs. Western Meadowlark.

Kaufman's writing style serves him well throughout the book. He shows himself to be a knowledgeable instructor who meticulously coaches

his students in solving problems. Rather than assaulting the reader with a barrage of confusing detail, he identifies the problem, provides pertinent comparative information, then gets to the point. He shies away from making too many absolute statements about identification, constantly reminding us of "pitfalls" and when to use a dose of caution. Quite simply, he comes straight across to the reader, and does so in an informative yet easy to digest manner.

I give top marks to Kaufman as an illustrator. While his artwork does not rival the breathtaking quality of a Lars Jonsson or a Killian Mullarney, it is nonetheless quite functional. He is able to stay away from exaggerating the differences between similar species in his drawings, to the point of distortion. His technique, particularly in the drawings of gulls and terns, reminds me somewhat of the work of the late P.J. Grant. Note the novel approach taken in depicting the progression of a Ring-billed Gull

from juvenile to adulthood on pages 104-105. I have only a few qualms about the drawings in the book. For Pacific Loon on page 24, he does not show the "chinstrap" effect being possessed by a juvenile. This variable feature was present on both of the first year birds that I have been lucky enough to see in Ontario. On page 44, I thought the peaked look to the head of the drake Lesser Scaup is not quite right. The Philadelphia Vireos depicted on pages 226 and 228 could show a more prominent pale crescent below the eye and a less prominent eyeline. I found the breast streaking on the female Purple Finch on page 270 to be a bit too thin.

With the art of field identification having evolved to the level of today, this book is a natural result. For anyone with a keen student's attitude towards birding, indeed for the legions who simply want to put the right name to any bird they see, I heartily recommend this fine new guide.

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***The Bald Eagle: Haunts and Habits of a Wilderness Monarch.*** 1988. By *Jon M. Gerrard* and *Gary R. Bortolotti*. Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. (paperback) 177 pp. + xiv. \$18.95

Few North American birds have evoked as much attention or emotion amongst birders or non-birders alike as the Bald Eagle. They have been hunted and poisoned. They have been revered, with their feathers and talons being symbols in religious rituals. They have been an inspiration to poets. The word "eagle" occurs in more than sixty place names in

Ontario alone. They have been the singular subject of scientific conferences. Indeed the Bald Eagle is one of the most widely and intensively studied bird species in North America. It has been declared an endangered species and described as an "ecological litmus paper". It is the symbol of one of the most powerful nations this earth has ever

known. And, of course, the sighting of a Bald Eagle is a highlight of the day on any birder's list.

In this book, the authors have attempted to take an in-depth look at the literature on the biology and ecology of Bald Eagles and combine that information with their own extensive research to put together a highly readable and informative product. In this reviewer's opinion, they have done an admirable job.

Each chapter starts off with one of the authors' personal anecdotes dealing with field experience of Bald Eagle research. This provides an inside view of some of the highs and lows in the sometimes laborious work involving behavioural studies, and serves as an introduction to the main theme of the chapter. This combination gives the reader an excellent sense of the passion and zeal these two "eagleologists" have demonstrated over the years. It also ties the writers' enthusiasm together with the science they go on to elucidate.

The book is divided into twelve chapters, starting with, appropriately, a look at the history of the Bald Eagle in terms of its former numbers and range. The authors then move quickly into a discussion of early naturalists' problems and perceptions in sorting out this species, as there was little awareness at that time of the various plumage changes this species goes through before attaining its characteristic adult plumage of white head and tail.

One of the primary theses in these authors' research was how age and sex might influence a Bald Eagle's behaviour and ecology. Throughout most of the remaining

chapters this is an integral theme.

Successive chapters deal with feathers and flight, diet and hunting/feeding techniques, nesting surveys, breeding behaviour and territoriality, nest sites and nest construction, courtship, nestling behaviour, banding, dispersal of fledged young, migration and winter distribution. The final chapter deals with the future of the Bald Eagle with respect to contaminants, habitat loss and management and reintroduction programs. The authors conclude in a guardedly optimistic way, that there is no reason to suspect that the Bald Eagle cannot adapt to the North America of today, provided there are relatively safe sources of food and places in which to rear their young.

Eleven appendices are included, ranging from measurements of males and females at various ages, to mean daily temperatures at wintering areas, to specifications for buffer zones around nest sites. Following the appendices is a "Notes" section, providing a chapter by chapter listing of references. Then comes a bibliography of more than 200 references and lastly, a topical index.

A variety of illustrative photographs and diagrams, all in black and white, are scattered throughout the book. Most of the photographs were taken in the vicinity of Besnard Lake, Saskatchewan, the location of much of the authors' research.

This book is pleasantly free of obvious errors. One of the diagrams illustrating types of flight used on migration was somewhat confusing, but overall the quality of information was excellent. A minor complaint was that, as one actively involved in

the management of Bald Eagles, I would have liked to have seen more information presented by the authors more thoroughly referenced.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone even remotely interested in this majestic species. It is in paperback form, and reasonably priced. It is written with the layman in mind, as the authors have

masterfully interpreted the science so that it will open a whole new perspective on Bald Eagle biology and ecology. At the same time they have provided a wealth of information, some of it from original research, for even the most ardent student of Bald Eagle behaviour. It is one of the most easily read "reference books" this reviewer has come across.

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***Birds of the Canadian Rockies.*** 1990. By *George W. Scotter, Tom J. Ulrich and Edgar T. Jones.* Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. (paperback) 170 pp. \$22.95

When I was a student in Hamilton a long time ago and geography was mostly about the red areas on the map of the world, I had the naive idea that the Rocky Mountains included everything west of the Alberta foothills. It was a long time before I learned otherwise, namely that the Rockies are just the first range going west, separated from numerous other ranges such as the Selkirks and Monashees by the Rocky Mountain trench, the deep valley where the headwaters of the Kootenay, Columbia and Fraser Rivers gather.

*Birds of the Canadian Rockies* is a pocket-sized field guide describing over 200 species that occur in those Rocky Mountains and their eastern foothills. Some of the species described here do not occur to the west and some that occur in the western mountains and valleys do not appear here.

The layout is that now found in

most guides, text on the left, pictures on the right. The text by George Scotter, who wrote *Wildflowers of the Canadian Rockies*, includes a brief description of breeding plumages, notes on their habits and preferred habitat, their abundance and where and when they occur throughout the region. The pictures are from photographs taken by Tom Ulrich and Edgar Jones plus a sizable contribution from others. The quality is very good, on a par with those in the Audubon Society Master Guide.

The text descriptions and pictures are limited to breeding adult plumages even in cases where the species is only a spring and/or fall migrant. In the latter case most sightings may be of juvenile or winter-plumaged birds. The text sometimes contains descriptions of similar species which are only named there. It seemed to me that in these cases it would have been more appropriate to include both names in

the heading, with the less common species in second position. Scotter's comments on problems of separating similar species often reflect personal experience, such as the statement that, between Hammond's and Dusky Flycatchers, "only God can tell them apart in the field and even He may have difficulty!". He tries to sort out their very similar songs but notes that sequences can be varied, and different observers will interpret them quite differently. A review of the interpretations of the two songs found in various guides and *Birds of Canada* will confirm that statement.

Also included is a checklist of the 315 species that have been recorded in the various national and provincial parks of the region. Of these, about 220 either breed in Ontario or are regular transients, and many of the remainder visit occasionally. There is an entry for each of seven parks or regions, ranging from Waterton Lakes N.P and the Kananaskis foothills in the south to Liard River Hotsprings in the north (just west of the Rockies, but the only good checklist in the north). These are ordered alphabetically rather than by longitude, the latter of which would

have given a better idea of whether each species was found in the north or south. Occurrence is limited to three categories: known to breed, recorded, and hypothetical. No indication of abundance is given so that we have to accept the authors' assessment as to which species should be included in the main text and which omitted. I suspect that in some cases the decision was based on the availability of a good photograph. The checklist gives no indication as to which species are described in the main text.

The publisher's blurb on the back cover says that "For nature lovers, backpackers, kitchen-window birders and the generally curious-minded, this easy-to-pack reference is an invaluable introduction...", and I would agree. With current North American guides describing over 800 species, trying to decide which one you may be looking at in Jasper N.P. could be a discouraging task. However, if you regularly see 200 to 300 species in a year, this book will be of help mostly in suggesting where to look for a particular species that you are hoping to add to your life list.

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