

ABOUT BOOKS

Editors' Choices for Seasonal Gifts

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land. Subhankar Banerjee. 2003. The Mountaineers Books: Seattle.

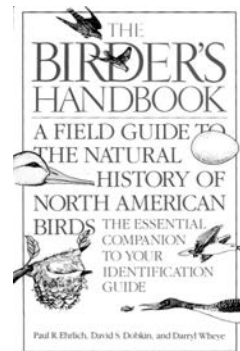


Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land is subtitled *A Photographic Journey*, but it is more than just one man's images of the northland. It is a stunning paean in photographs and words to the most remote, most austere, most beautiful, and most threatened of our national wildlife refuges. Accompanying Banerjee's photographs are essays by Peter Mathiessen, Fran Mauer, William H. Meadows, Debbie S. Miller, George B. Schaller, and David Allen Sibley. These essays run the gamut from impassioned pleas to historical recitations, but they all contain a bit of the essence of the connection between the authors and this remarkable land. In some cases, the connections are lifelong, in others brief, but clearly this is a place that has had a profound influence on all.

So why give this book to a birder? Well, one reason might be to defy big oil and government plans to ruin the refuge for a piddling amount of oil. Or it might be to lend support to Banerjee, whose Smithsonian photographic exhibit was banished to the basement after the politicians found it too uncomfortable. Or maybe to help support conservation of this remarkable landscape. (I may never make it there, but it warms my heart to know it exists.) Or the reason might be the artistry of the photographs, for the muskoxen, mountains, lichen, caribou, and the birds: ptarmigan exploding from the snow, a Pacific Loon on the nest, golden plovers, eiders, the Gyrfalcon chick, or the displaying Buff-breasted Sandpiper on page 98 (my favorite image in the book). Or maybe for all of these reasons. You had better buy two copies; you will want to keep one.

David Larson

The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds. Paul R. Erlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye. 1988. Simon and Schuster: New York.



My favorite bird book, like everyone else's, is hard to choose. I have enjoyed various essay-type books, species monographs, and behavioral studies, but the ones I keep coming back to are the references. If I have to pick one book

above the others, for its overall value to me in my study of birds and writing about birds, it must be *The Birder's Handbook*.

The Birder's Handbook is an encyclopedia, and in that regard it is in the same league with Chris Leahy's *The Birdwatcher's Companion* (1982, with a second edition about to be published) and John Terres's *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* (most recent edition 1996), which are also outstanding references. But it is *The Birder's Handbook* I use the most, and even carry in the field with me in the nesting season, because it is compact and carries more information on each species in half a page than any other book ever written on North American birds. The subtitle is not an exaggeration: it is an encyclopedia that is truly a *field* guide.

All the species accounts are on the left-side pages, two to a page. The right-side pages contain the essays on multitudinous subjects that make the book an encyclopedia. Those pages I use no more frequently than the other two works, but the species accounts are worth their weight in gold. Each contains a wealth of information on the nesting biology of the species, as well as the primary and secondary food sources and the means of obtaining them. Much of the information is in the form of symbols, with an easy-to-use key inside the front cover and a sample species layout with everything explained inside the back cover. All terms and symbols are defined in the introduction. The symbols tell me at a glance where the nest is likely to be placed and how high, who builds it (male and/or female), how many eggs are laid, whether the species is monogamous, promiscuous, etc., who incubates, how long it takes for the eggs to hatch and the young to fledge, who feeds the young before and after fledging, what the bird eats, and how it forages or hunts. That's a lot of information in less than an inch of space across the page!

Blackpoll Warbler

Dendroica striata Forster

NG-368; G-284; PE-232; PW-pl 50; AE-pl 563; AW-pl 609; AM(III)-156



2'-7'
(To 33')



F



4-5 (3-5)
MONOG
(POLYGYN)

F
I: 12? DAYS
ALTRICIAL
F: 11-12 DAYS
MF



BERRIES



BARK
GLEAN
HAWKS

The brief text below the symbols gives remarkably compact details on breeding habitat, displays, nest location and description, eggs, diet, conservation issues, and useful notes about the species, often behavioral. It also provides cross-references to related essays on the right-hand pages and, finally, bibliographical references. All this on half a page!

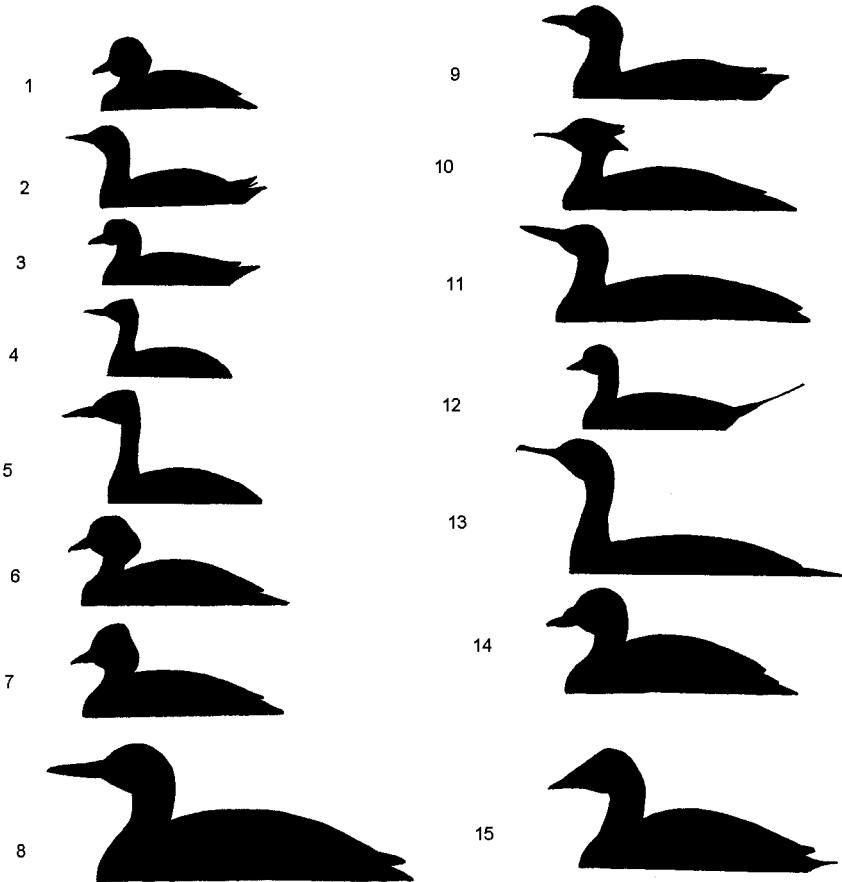
The Birder's Handbook is like no other book I have ever seen (except the authors' companion volume for European birds), and ounce for ounce is the best reference I own. I use it constantly in conjunction with my two cherished field guides to birds' nests, Hal Harrison's *Field Guide to Birds' Nests* (1975) and Paul Baicich and Colin Harrison's *Guide to the Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds*. I can't imagine a serious birder being without this book.

Jim Berry

Winter Waterfowl Quiz

When the light is lousy sometimes all you have to go on is a silhouette of a bird. If that bird is bouncing around on the waves, the wind is threatening the stability of your tripod, and your eyelashes are becoming crisp, you have entered the winter waterfowl zone. For now, relax indoors and try to match up these silhouettes with the species listed below. The sizes of the birds are approximately relative.

These images are supplied courtesy of Bill Gette, Sanctuary Director of the Joppa Flats Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary in Newburyport, Massachusetts. Answers will appear in the next issue of *Bird Observer*.



Horned Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Black Guillemot, Murre sp., Harlequin Duck, Long-tailed Duck, Scoter sp., Common Eider, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-throated Loon, Cormorant sp., Common Loon.

Help Produce *Bird Observer*

Bird Observer is produced by an all-volunteer staff who enjoy the chance to contribute something to the birding community. We are currently looking for someone to fill the following position:

Mailing Manager: Works with the Production Editor, Subscription Manager, and other volunteers to coordinate the printing and mailing of the journal. The Mailing Manager picks up the issue from the printer, maintains mailing supplies, organizes a team of mailers, and participates in labeling and sorting the issue. Not much time is involved, but this position requires good communication skills and a take-charge attitude.

Interested? To discuss it further, call David Larson at 978-462-9998, or e-mail him at dlarson@massaudubon.org.



BALD EAGLE FOUND DEAD IN CHESHIRE

Information Sought; Reward Offered

An immature bald eagle was found dead in the Stafford Hill Wildlife Management Area near Jenks Road in Cheshire, Mass., according to Special Agent Tom Ricardi of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement. X-rays of the eagle carcass showed multiple pellets, Ricardi said, indicating that it was likely shot. The bird was probably killed on Saturday [October 25, 2003].

"Thousands of Americans have worked for decades to restore the eagle population from the brink of extinction," Ricardi said. "How disheartening to see this majestic symbol of our nation deliberately killed."

Individuals with information about this crime are asked to contact Special Agent Ricardi at 860-240-3232 or Massachusetts Environmental Police at 800-632-8075. Callers may choose to remain anonymous.

Massachusetts hosts 30 resident nesting eagles and likely another 30 immature eagles, according to MassWildlife. Eagles usually start building nests when they are 5 years old. Bald eagles are protected by the Endangered Species Act, the Eagle Protection Act, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Penalties for violations range up to a \$10,000 fine. The Service is offering a reward of half of any fine collected up to \$2,500 for information about the shooting that leads to a conviction.

Additional information about bald eagles can be found at <http://endangered.fws.gov/i/B0H.html>.

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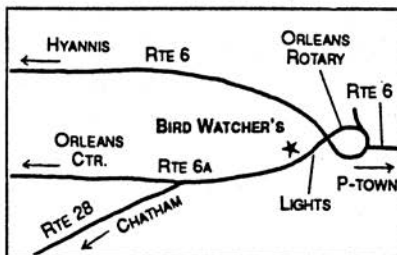
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