

REVIEW

The Birds of Pinellas County, by Ron Smith. 2016. St. Petersburg Audubon Society, St. Petersburg, Florida. ISBN 978-0-692-81085-9. \$25 softcover. vii + 192 pages.

Despite the ornithological wealth found in Florida, surprisingly few summaries of the birdlife of the state's counties or regions have been published. I suspect that the primary reason for this dearth of published data is that few birders have been willing to spend hundreds of hours compiling the data, separating the relevant information from the mundane, writing the manuscript, and then finding a publisher willing to fund a book that is unlikely to sell more than a few hundred copies—or self-publishing the book. Fortunately for us, Ron Smith of St. Petersburg accepted the challenge of summarizing more than a century of bird data from Florida's most densely-populated county, and—perhaps contradictorily—one of its most ornithologically diverse. With *The Birds of Pinellas County*, Smith has added to the sparse list of Florida regional bird summaries published over the past four decades, most notably *The Birds of Brevard County* (Cruickshank 1980, Florida Press), *The Birds of Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa Counties, Florida*, third edition (Duncan and Duncan 2018, self-published), and *A Birdwatcher's Guide to Alachua County, Florida*, second edition (Rowan and Manetz 2006, self-published). Smith's book is an extensive revision of his earlier *A Birder's Guide to Pinellas County (Florida)*, published in 2011 and not reviewed in this journal.

The information in *The Birds of Pinellas County* is thorough, up-to-date (through 2016), and well presented. Commendably, Smith follows the format of other Florida bird books published recently in distinguishing records (observations that are verifiable from specimen or photographic evidence) from reports (sightings that are not supported by such evidence). The taxonomy rigorously follows the American Ornithological Society *Checklist of North and Middle American Birds* through the 56th supplement published in July 2016. The text is interspersed with 27 color photographs of birds taken in Pinellas County. Although these tend to represent rarities that only advanced birders have seen, most of the photographs are of high quality and add greatly to the book's visual appeal; they also allow several rarities to be documented in print.

The Introduction includes the impressive statistic that 394 bird species have been “verified” in Pinellas County. I'll comment more about this definition later in the review. Seven species were added to the verified list between 2011 and 2016, among these Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*), Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*), and Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*). Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) was verified in 2018, and Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) and Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) have been verified thus far in 2019 (R. Smith in litt.). Breeding species of Pinellas County total 110 native and established exotic species.

Smith next details the extensive ornithological, conservation, and birding history of the county in the chapter entitled Pinellas Birding History. Because of the large wading bird rookeries that were plundered for and decimated by the plume trade, Pinellas County was at the forefront of the bird-conservation movement. Smith chronicles the visits by ornithologists such as W. E. D. Scott, Robert Holt, Clifford Pangburn, and William Fargo, among others, whose pioneering studies from the 1880s to the 1930s helped shape the ornithological history of the region. Smith also details the contributions of Katherine Bell Tippits, the founder and first president of the St. Petersburg Audubon Society, who was instrumental in establishing 11 bird sanctuaries in the county. The St. Petersburg

Christmas Bird Count has been conducted every winter since 1928.

The next two chapters, The Pinellas Birding Year and Pinellas County Birding Sites, are grouped together here. The first chapter details predictable ornithological events occurring in the county during each month (e.g., “During January, wintering ducks can be found on most bodies of water, a few hawks and falcons are stationed around the county watching for unsuspecting prey, and Bald Eagles and Great Horned Owls are either on their nests or about to be.” And, “There is no month like October that draws as many rare birds.”). The second chapter describes 24 birding sites in Pinellas County, the ideal season(s) to visit, and a list of several species to look for. Some of the sites, such as Fort De Soto Park, Honeymoon Island State Park, and Dunedin Hammock Park, are significant sites that have been known for decades, while others, such as “28th Street Wetlands,” Eagle Lake Park, and Kapok Park, are lesser-known sites that have been discovered recently.

Chapter 4, About the Annotated Checklist, explains the definitions, abbreviations, and symbols found in the species accounts. Eight abundance/frequency categories are used: Common (“expected”), Uncommon (“present, but in low numbers”), Irregular (“migrant or summering/wintering species present in the season[s] indicated, but numbers vary from year to year”), Occasional (“infrequently present”), Rare (“two known reports/records”), Casual (“one or two known reports/records of a species that may again be expected to occur”), Accidental (“one or two reports/records of a species not expected to occur again”), and Extirpated (“driven out by human activity and no longer found”). Following this is Chapter 5, The Annotated Checklist. By my count, 415 species are included, with 394 of these “verified” and 21 others “unverified.” An additional 34 species, all “non-countable” exotics, are placed in a separate list (here, termed an appendix) at the end. In his Introduction, Smith follows standard ornithological practice in defining a “verified” species as one that has been photographed, salvaged, or collected in the county. But Smith also considers a species to be “verified” if a “detailed written account” has been accepted by members of the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee.

Species accounts follow the format first published in *Florida Bird Species: An Annotated List* (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Florida Ornithological Society): after the English and scientific names of a species there follows a brief sentence or two giving its status and seasonal distribution in the county. Seven examples follow: Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) is an “Irregular spring through fall visitor/resident (Apr-Sep);” Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodramus scolopaceus*) is an “Occasional migrant and winter visitor (Oct-May);” Flammulated Owl (*Otus flammeolus*) is an “Accidental visitor;” Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) is a “Common permanent resident ... throughout the county, more so at the north end;” American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) is a “Common migrant (Mar-May, Aug-Nov)” that is “Occasional in summer (Jun-Jul) and winter (Dec-Jan);” Northern Cardinal is a “Common permanent resident. Every neighborhood has a pair (or two)...” and Brewer’s Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) is an “Occasional fall through winter visitor (Oct-Feb).” Most accounts include specific dates, locations, and observers of from a few to many reports to provide additional information beyond the introductory sentence(s). Accounts average 8-12 lines of text, varying from one line for Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*) and Boat-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus major*) to 28 lines for Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*).

Of the 415 species in the main list, three represent non-established exotics that should have been included in the appendix: a wing-clipped Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)—unquestionably a local escapee or release—that Smith terms an “accidental visitor;” a few Egyptian Geese (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) that were seen last in 1985 and that were not related to the population now established in the southeastern peninsula (Pranty and Ponzio 2014, Status and distribution of Egyptian Geese [*Alopochen aegyptiaca*] in southeastern Florida. *Florida Field Naturalist* 42:91-107); and the population of African Collared-Doves (*Streptopelia “risoria”*) that has been extirpated

for 30 years. (Budgerigar, *Melopsittacus undulatus*, extirpated for 20 years, is relegated to the appendix despite having been much more numerous and widespread than was the dove). Three natural vagrants seem to be erroneously considered “verified;” Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) was accepted even though the verifiable evidence (a photographic slide) is long lost, thus preventing Clark’s Grebe (*A. clarkii*) from being ruled out; Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) was accepted despite seemingly not meeting any of Smith’s “verified” criteria; and California Gull (*Larus californicus*) was accepted even though the primary observer (Lyn Atherton) later “recanted” the sightings, believing them to represent aberrant Herring Gulls (*L. argentatus*). Finally, 20 species not verified in the county, such as American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*), Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*), Bewick’s Wren (*Thryothorus bewickii*), Bachman’s Warbler (*Vermivora bachmanii*), and Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), are included in the Annotated Checklist solely on the basis of reports, some of which Smith appears to doubt (and rightly so). These species belong in a “hypothetical” list separate from the main list.

I noted several errors in the book, the most important being, 1) it was Arthur Howell who authored *Florida Bird Life* (1932); 2) the local, resident subspecies of Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) is *marianae*, named after W. E. D. Scott’s wife, Marian; 3) Clifford Pangburn’s report of two Zenaida Doves at Pass-A-Grille, in 1918 (not 1989) was later retracted (Pangburn 1937, *Auk* 54:574), a note that Smith apparently overlooked; 4) the status of Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) should read “an uncommon permanent resident”; 5) the date of W. E. D. Scott’s report of Hudsonian Godwit was in 1886 (R. Smith in litt.); and 6) there is no record of Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) in Florida other than the Pinellas County skeleton.

If Ron Smith again revises his book, then I recommend that he restrict his Annotated Checklist to verified species that can be documented via *extant* specimens or photographs, and that all remaining species be considered “hypothetical” and be relegated to one or more appendices. I also suggest that he use fewer and more-standard abundance/frequency categories; I suspect that many species currently labeled as uncommon or occasional would be better considered as rare in the county. Additionally, information on “non-countable” exotic species needs to be made more consistent.

Ron Smith and the St. Petersburg Audubon Society are to be commended for publishing this excellent book. I highly recommend *The Birds of Pinellas County* to anybody interested in the avifauna of Florida, as well as birders who intend to visit Pinellas County or neighboring counties. This book belongs in college and university libraries as an essential ornithological reference of the birds of the Tampa Bay region.

I thank Ron Smith for providing information about his book, and Dave Goodwin for facilitating this review.

Bill Pranty, 8515 Village Mill Row, Bayonet Point, Florida 34667-2662.