

BOOK REVIEWS

The Birds of Yakima County, Washington, by Andrew Stepniewski. 1999. Yakima Valley Audubon Society, Yakima, WA. 278 pages, 28 black-and-white drawings, 5 maps. Paperback, \$21.95. ISBN 0-9674378-0-6.

Containing most of what you might wish to find, this 8½ × 11-inch volume could stand as the paradigm for county bird books. The author moved to Yakima County in 1978 and brought a professional attitude to bear in tracking down its bird life. Since then, he has systematically sought birds in all corners of the county, greatly expanding what was already a substantial knowledge base for a single county. The region treated extends from high elevations at Mount Adams and the Cascade Crest down to the valleys of the Yakima and Columbia rivers, thus encompassing a great variety of habitats and, accordingly, bird life. The species list for the county is not far behind those of King and Whatcom counties, both with county books published and both with coastlines.

The author's primary goal was "to elucidate each of the 302 species' status and distribution in this area and, just as important, its occurrence in a regional context." He has succeeded admirably in his first goal, and indeed the regional context is indicated for many species.

The book contains so much information that the Table of Contents could fill the space available for this review, and the amount of additional material is indicated by the individual species accounts—the "meat" of the book—occupying only half of its pages. There are maps of the county showing physiography, vegetation zones, public lands, and birdwatching sites. There are descriptions of each major habitat type, along with lists of birds characteristic of them and—something I found delightful—a full-page drawing of each habitat by Debra Davis with tiny birds *in situ*. Put together, those drawings would make an educational poster. The black-and-white drawings of individual birds make up in charm and habitat depiction what many of them lack in ornithological accuracy.

The introduction goes on to include a history of ornithology in Yakima County, a brief account of bird seasons, and a bar-graph chart of phenologies. There is also a fairly extensive guide to bird finding in the county, mostly organized around the relatively few lengthy roads. The main part of the text treats the species recorded from the county at that time, varying from a brief discussion of a single record for rare species to a full page for species of special interest, such as the Spotted Owl and Spruce Grouse, or very well-known species, such as the Red-tailed Hawk and Horned Lark. The status of each species is summarized at the beginning of the account. The level of detail presented is sufficient to include interesting aspects of distribution as a consequence of the county's range in elevation and habitats. For example, through his extensive field work, the author has discovered a surprising amount of movement by woodpeckers and corvids normally considered resident.

The lengthier accounts are full of interesting natural-history information, in fact, a tremendous amount of it, as well as being thorough summaries of the occurrence of the species in Yakima County. The accounts of the common species should be required reading for those interested in the natural history of Washington birds. Note the length of the *Empidonax* and sparrow accounts, which might convince one that the author has a particular love for dull-colored passerines.

As if the text summaries weren't enough, the author goes on to include a whole series of appendix tables. One summarizes distribution, habitat preference, and seasonality of each species, all in a single very handy format that could become the standard for bird lists handed out in wildlife refuges and nature centers. There follow tables showing the results of two Breeding Bird Surveys and two Christmas Bird Counts from the county. The Yakima Valley CBC has been carried out for sufficient time that it could be used as an indicator of bird population changes in the county. Finally, the results of a 1998 May big day, with nine teams participating, indicate the great diversity of breeding birds in the county.

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I discovered no significant errors when reading the introductory material and many of the species accounts. Stepniewski has done his homework very well, ferreting out—and compiling in a very readable summary—specimen records, publications, and unpublished records from the many birders who have visited this interesting county.

What more might one ask for in a county bird book? I recently visited Monterey County, California, and used Don Roberson's *Monterey Birds*, published in 1985. That book has several features not present in the Yakima County book: (1) seasonal bar graphs associated with each species account as well as in a separate table, (2) specific birding routes, with mileages and more explicit directions, (3) range maps for all species known to breed in the county, (4) numerous photos documenting county rarities, (5) a small series of color photos of habitats and both common and rare birds, and (6) small size (dimensions much smaller, weight about half). Of these differences, 1, 2, 3, and 6 all make the Monterey book of greater use in the field. However, the Yakima book contains considerably more information and in addition is more fun to read. It should be considered a reference for the bookshelf rather than the car seat.

If you live in anywhere in Washington state, you should have *The Birds of Yakima County* as a significant reference. If you live anywhere else in the world, acquire a copy just to own a superb example of this kind of book.

Dennis R. Paulson