

# Book Reviews

## ZOOLOGY

### Seasons of North American Birds: engagement calendar 1984.

Photographs by Jean-Louis Frund. Text by Odas White. 1983. Whitecap Books (distributed by Firefly Books, Scarborough). 100 pp., illus. \$12.95.

This calendar book, as suggested by the title, presents some 53 species as they are found in Canada in the respective seasons. The photographs have been carefully selected to present the birds in representative habitats and activities for each particular season. The birds, with few exceptions, such as a Snow Goose staging area in Quebec, are depicted singly or in small groups at close enough range to be easily recognized. The clarity of the photographs and poses selected are excellent.

For each week there is a bird photo, on the left, and a calendar/diary on the right. The calendar pages have a daily column with 12 (8 am to 8pm) of lines. A small monthly calendar and space for birding notes at the bottom, complete the page. The calendar pages have a cut-off corner for easy access.

I would have some difficulty putting notes in the

narrow columns allotted for each day. My own preference is for horizontal daily spaces without hourly divisions. The book itself is well produced with a hard cover that will preserve it better than the usual surloin or wire ring binding. The photographs are both taken and printed with excellent quality.

The short write-ups on each species provide interesting insights into the seasonal activities of the species and their natural history. The author increases the interest by expressing the photographer's enthusiasm on suddenly attaining a rare shot, whether it is an unusual species or a common bird in an unparalleled pose. Although short, these write-ups give a feeling of affinity to anyone who has spent hours searching for and photographing birds.

WILSON EEDY

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### Where to Find Birds in New York State: the top 500 sites

By Susan Roney Drennan. 1981. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse. 672 pp., 106 maps. Cloth U.S. \$38.00; Paper \$18.95.

Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr., certainly started something when in 1951 he published *A Guide to Bird Finding East of the Mississippi*. Pettingill wished his book to bring to persons the country over a greater awareness of the endless opportunities for bird finding in all states. A perusal of the American Birding Association's sales list shows that a majority of the states have at least some regional coverage on where to find birds and several have statewide coverage. A sampling of some of the most noteworthy includes Lane's birder's guides to southeastern Arizona, southern California, eastern Colorado, Florida, Texas coast, and Rio Grande Valley; a few from states bordering Canada: *Guide to Bird-finding in Washington*, *Birder's Guide to North Dakota*, and *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota*; and several from Canadian provinces; *Where to Find Birds in British Columbia*, four regional guides for Manitoba, *A Birdwatcher's Guide to Atlantic Canada*, *Where to Find Birds in Nova Scotia*, and *Bird-finding Guide to Ontario*. Birders are

apparently getting what they desire, and now New York, which previously only had regional coverage, has a statewide guide.

The book is divided into two parts, the first a small section that discusses New York's Avian Records Committee and rare bird alerts, ornithological collections and libraries, and physiographic regions. The major second part covers the 10 regions used for reporting bird sightings in New York's bird journal, *The Kingbird*. Chapters on seabirds and pelagic birding, and hawk migration also are included. A three-page bibliography and a 13-page special species status and site index concludes the volume. An integral feature is the inclusion of 106 site maps. These maps differ considerably in scope and detail although most appear to be useful. The addition of a scale would have been a decided benefit to the user.

While I commend Ms. Drennan for her tremendous effort in assembling this valuable information, I have several criticisms. I have always felt that along with a thorough knowledge of the subject matter, anyone who undertakes writing a book should have a feel for the language and fundamental grasp of grammar.



Although another reviewer of this book found its style to be engaging and conversational, I found Ms. Drennan's florid style an English teacher's nightmare. In some sections the reader must wade with great difficulty through jungles of commas and dangling clauses. A tightening of the style could have reduced the size of the book (and its considerable price) as could have the elimination of the author's pontifications on the wonders of the natural order. Inclusion of considerable natural history information sets this guide off from others but how much is enough?

In general, more organization would have improved the book's usefulness. More subheadings would help people locate the information they want. There is no consistent ordering of information for an area with the area's description, ownership and history, natural history information, directions, and birding information more or less all blended together. The directions especially could have been set out from the other information. I found many of the directions rather inconsistent and unclear. Mileage from a major

town or intersection for all sites would be helpful, and a regional map showing all sites within the region would have been informative. Areas within a region do not appear to be presented in any logical order.

Just the little thumbing and reading I have done is fraying and curling the cover of my paper copy. Perhaps a different binding would help the book stand up to in-and-out-of car use. The \$38.00 hardbound copy is an expensive option.

Even with my criticisms taken into account, birders who travel in New York State will probably need a copy. Because all environments are in a constant state of change, I hope that Ms. Drennan and the authors of other state guides find time to periodically update their works.

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### Gulls: A guide to identification

By P. J. Grant. 1982. Buteo Books, Vermillion, South Dakota and T. & A. D. Poyser Ltd., Calton, Staffordshire, England. 280 pp., illus. U.S. \$32.50.

This book is based mostly on material published by the author in a series of five papers in *British Birds* between 1978 and 1981. The book title is somewhat misleading because it considers only 23 species of gulls (about half the world total) which are found in "Europe, the Middle East and eastern North America". Oddly though, the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) and the Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*), to mention only two included species, also occur commonly in western North America. Similarly, the Glaucous Gull (*L. hyperboreus*), Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*), Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*) and others considered, occur in the Siberian Arctic, not what this reviewer would consider part of Europe. I think the term Holarctic is a better term to describe the distribution of species covered.

The author places the gulls into five groups, each containing species with similar characteristics, especially in their immature plumage, which, as the author correctly notes, is the stage that most people find they have identification problems. Each group is introduced by a general account of topographic characters, with drawings by the author, distribution and body measurements (lengths of wing, tail, bill and tarsus). The latter are taken from Dwight's 1925 classic monograph *The Gulls of the World*. The detailed species

accounts within each group include identification clues, an ageing summary (based on plumage colour), details and figures of each plumage stage and a distribution map.

Following the 149 pages of text are 376 very good black and white photographs of the 23 species. The photos show gulls standing, flying, swimming, in flocks, feeding, and some on their nests. They are designed to illustrate many of the features discussed in the species account section. A brief reference section lists 12 articles related to the subject matter of the book.

My major problems with the book stem from its British slant. The terminology used in some of the topography and plumage sequences will perhaps be confusing to many North American readers. Some examples: Juvenile is used instead of juvenal; the white spots on the tips of primaries that most of us call windows are termed mirrors; crown is called cap on page 18 then crown on page 19 (!) and the primaries are numbered distally instead of proximally. The plumage sequences are very puzzling. I can't understand how a bird that hatches in July is not considered to be in its first summer of life at that time. Grant discounts the hatching summer as the first and considers that a first summer bird (one that is actually in its second year of life) moults into its second winter plumage! This means for instance that a bird that is in its fourth year of life is in its third summer plumage.





Cutright, Noel J. 1984. "Where to Find Birds in New York State: the top 500 sites, by Susan Roney Drennan [Review]." *The Canadian field-naturalist* 98(2), 265–266. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.355143>.

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