

Book Reviews

ZOOLOGY

A Field Guide to Freshwater Fishes: North America North of Mexico

By Lawrence M. Page and Brooks M. Burr. 1991. The Peterson Field Guide Series 42, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. xii + 432 pp., 48 plates, 377 maps. U.S. \$15.95.

This long-awaited guide complements those on Pacific (1983) and Atlantic (1986) coast fishes of North America. It briefly distinguishes, figures, and maps 790 species found in freshwaters of the continental U.S.A. and Canada.

The layout will be familiar to all users of Peterson guides. Short sections cover for each species "Identification", "Range", "Habitat", "Similar Species", and occasionally "Remarks". There are some text illustrations of identification characters but most species are illustrated in the 48 plates, 33 in colour, in the centre of the guide. Distribution is covered by the 377 maps grouped at the end of the guide. Some maps have the distribution of more than one species depicted on them. Information on a single species is therefore spread among three, widely separated parts of the book, an inevitable, but financially necessary, nuisance as in most field guides. While text and plates are indexed, maps are not requiring a double step to find a species map from the index via the text account. Colour is generally good as are pigmentation patterns in the black and white plates but with up to 22 species per 11 x 8 cm page, some detail and accuracy are lost. Maps run up to 6 on a page and vary in scope between all of North America to a single state. Some Canadian distributions are necessarily generalised to the point of inaccuracy.

North American freshwater fish families are all recognisable at a glance, with a little practice. The problem lies in the diversity within families. For example, minnows comprise 230 species and one genus alone, *Notropis*, has 71 species (there are 14

plates of minnow species illustrated and the text covers almost a third of the guide). The authors have tried to overcome this diversity by giving brief generic descriptions, thus chopping the family into smaller chunks, but considerable experience would be needed to identify minnows. It is tempting to suggest other or additional methods of grouping species, such as unique characters, comparative tables of characters, abbreviate keys, distribution, etc. but there is no real solution in the field guide format on a North American scale. Canadians would argue for a Canadian field guide since much of the diversity is found in the central and southern United States.

The guide incorporates a variety of recent taxonomic changes in the salmon, minnow, and catfish families not found in other recent books. This may cause some confusion to readers since the changes are not indicated and no reference source is given. The American Fisheries Society *List of Common and Scientific Names* (1991 edition) had not appeared when this guide went to press.

In a work of this scope errors in detail are unavoidable. The Atlantic (or Acadian) Whitefish, unique to Nova Scotia, is said to occur in "Leipsigate" Lake, correctly Milipsigate. Black Buffalo occur in Canada and Black Bullheads are found in British Columbia and Ontario but these distributions are not mentioned here. There are numerous other minor errors which, however, do not detract from the general utility of the work on a North American scale. Finally, freshwater fishes can attain a status in common with other taxa in the popular appreciation of natural diversity.

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A Field Guide to Western Birds

By Roger Tory Peterson, with maps by Virginia Marie Peterson. 1990. The Peterson Field Guide Series. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. (Canadian Distributor: Thomas Allen & Son, Markham). 432 pp., illus. Cloth \$29.95; paper \$19.95.

A new edition of a major bird guide is always an event. A new edition of one of Roger Tory Peterson's Guides is a red-letter event, keenly anticipated and eagerly welcomed when it appears.

This is particularly so in the case of the new Western Guide. Its predecessor predated all the contemporary advances in guides and bird identification, and it was never as satisfying a book to work with as the legendary Eastern Guide of the same vintage — the images were too small and the plates too cluttered. The current edition of the Eastern Guide appeared in 1980; since then the revised Western Guide has been awaited impatiently. It was worth the wait.



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