

dominated forests, that are being logged in rapid fashion, yet they are on no one's research agenda.

Although the book is well-researched, the section entitled "Comparative ecology and distribution" contains some curious errors. For example, Table 3 shows ranges of weights of preferred prey as large (>500 g), medium (250-500 g) and small (<250 g). Snowy Owls, (that prefer lemmings); Spotted Owls (that prefer flying squirrels and small rodents), and Barred Owls (that eat mostly small rodents) are incorrectly listed as preferring large prey items. On page 33, Great-horned Owls and Snowy Owls are reported as being sympatric. In fact, the only area where their ranges overlap is the northwestern coast of Alaska,

where they separate spatially, and on more than 95% of their respective ranges these two species are allopatric. However, these small errors are insufficient to detract from the general quality of the book.

I found the book to be highly readable and provided valuable insights into the ecology of owls, but I wished that it had been revised with current information. The book is a recommended volume for anyone with an interest in these elusive yet interesting birds.

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## A Guide to the Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds

By Paul J. Baicich and Colin J. O. Harrison, illustrated by Andrew Burton, Philip Burton, and Terry O'Nele, and egg photographs by F. Greenaway and Clark Sumida. Second Edition 1997. Academic Press, 525 B Street, Suite 1900, San Diego, California 92101-4495. 348 pp., illus. \$31.95, U.S. \$22.95.

This is the second edition of Colin Harrison's 1978 guide, with essentially the same format and the same plates as its predecessor. For the reader who is unfamiliar with the plan of the first edition, the core of the book consists of accounts of the nests, eggs, and nesting characteristics of some 669 species. Species coverage typically starts with a brief statement on nesting sites and habitat, and then covers nest, breeding season, eggs, incubation, nestling, and nestling period. There are 64 coloured plates of eggs and a selection of about 150 chicks and nestlings, supplemented by sketches of typical nests scattered through the text. Introductory sections provide useful general information on the topics covered in the body of the text, together with hints on nest findings and details on nest record schemes. Finally, there is a set of rather general identification keys for nests, eggs, nestlings, and chicks.

The format may be the same but the changes are comprehensive, reflecting not only the many taxonomic changes since 1978 and the species added to the North American list in that period, but including

up-to-date information on nesting. The first edition relied heavily on Bent's *Life Histories of North American Birds* for its information, but the current text recognizes a wide range of sources, and is correspondingly comprehensive. Even the plates have been rearranged to conform to current taxonomy, with some additions including four Shiny Cowbird eggs. The text illustrations have been considerably expanded with the addition of sketches by Terry O'Nele.

The inevitable comparisons will be with the two volumes by Hal Harrison in the Peterson Field Guide series. These offer photographs of the nests and eggs (most in colour), a feature lacking in the present book, and are a more compact size. In all other aspects, however, this volume emerges a clear winner: not only is it much more up-to-date, but the material is much more comprehensive and detailed and the egg illustrations are larger and clearer. In fact, these three books now complement one another very well, and anyone working in this field will wish to have all three. In all, a job well done, and highly recommended as a concise and up-to-date summary of matters associated with bird nests and nesting.

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## Vancouver Birds in 1995

By Kyle Elliott and Wayne Gardner. 1997. Vancouver Natural History Society. Vancouver, 92 pp., illus. \$14.95.

This volume is the latest offering from the Vancouver Natural History Society (VNHS), and like their previous publications is of a high standard. As the title suggests, it presents a summary of all

bird species observed during the 1995 calendar year within the Vancouver Checklist area. An impressive 70 000 records were submitted by 193 observers, through the VNHS Bird Alert line, the four (five in 1995) local Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs), banding data from Sea Island, and various bird surveys. The high degree of participation in all these projects



reminds me once again, of just how dynamic the Vancouver birding community is.

An introductory section defines the Vancouver Checklist area and provides the rationale for this report: "to record the seasonal occurrence, abundance, and distribution of each bird species so that future changes will be discernible." As a statistical snapshot of one birding year, this book provides some interesting reading. However, if similar summaries are issued on a periodic basis, then this work would be very valuable as a management and conservation tool. Comparisons over time of a species distribution and abundance will provide hard data with which to make informed decisions regarding conservation concerns.

A short section of the book reviews local birding projects and provides data on mist net captures at the Sea Island banding station, as well as results of the monthly bird surveys at Maplewood Flats in North Vancouver. Sixteen pages of very good photographs highlight some of the species observed in 1995. The main body of the book, however, is taken up with the summary of the 282 species found that year.

The authors note that this list summarizes "arrival dates, migration numbers, high counts, departure dates, noteworthy records, and the number of reports made for each species." CBC data is also included where applicable. Each species is listed first by its

common name, followed by the scientific name, the 4-letter species code, and seasonal abundance; an asterisk indicates breeding. The average arrival date is given for some spring migrants. Tables showing the median number of birds per month at one or all of four primary birding locations, Iona and Sea Islands, Reifel Refuge, and Jericho Park, are given for 97 species.

While Vancouver birders won't need any prompting to buy this book, I highly recommend it to anyone contemplating a birding trip to the area. It gives a fair indication of the relative ease or difficulty of finding some of those west coast specialties including Crested Myna, Tufted Duck, Pacific Golden Plover, Wandering Tattler, and Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. And just to whet the appetite one can note the rarities found that year, such as Emperor Goose, White-tailed Kite, Bar-tailed Godwit, Slaty-backed Gull, and Ash-throated Flycatcher, and aspire to similar finds. Used together with a bird-finding guide, such as another excellent VNHS publication, *A Bird Watching Guide to the Vancouver Area* (1993), there should be no trouble planning a trip to see the maximum number of species.

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## The Federation of Alberta Naturalists Field Guide to Alberta Birds

By Bruce McGillivray and Glen P. Semenchuk. 1998. Federation of Alberta Naturalists, P.O. Box 1472, Edmonton T5J 2N5. 350 pages, 313 colour photographs, 296 maps, 2 diagrams. \$24.95 + \$4.00 shipping.

Wow! Just when I thought that existing field guides had given us everything one could reasonably expect, along comes a new guide for one province, Alberta, that is chock-full of useful new innovations.

For the first time ever, the beginner is given four criteria, each rated on a scale of 1 to 3, for habitat, sight, sound, and behavior. For example, the Sprague's Pipit rates three checkmarks for sound and three for habitat (native grassland), two for behaviour (flying high) and only one for sight. Most *Empidonax* flycatchers get three for sound and one or two for habitat, but Alder, Willow, and Hammond's get none at all for sight! The Canvasback and Ring-necked Duck each earn only one rating, a three for sight. The Ruffed Grouse and Killdeer both receive three each for sight and sound, two for behavior and one for habitat. Bonaparte's Gull collects three for habitat, two each for sight and behavior, and one for sound. The Gray Jay earns three each for behavior and sight, two for sound and one for habitat. The American Dipper obtains three

each for habitat and behavior, two for sight and one for sound. Clearly these are subjective ratings, but they ring true, and should be a tremendous help to the novice in deciding whether to identify the bird by sight, by sound, by habitat, or by behaviour.

Other features also differ from previous field guides. The Latin names of each species are explained. There is a photo of the egg, giving its length and width, for each species. Date bars across the bottom of each page show the time of year that species may be expected. There is a box to check and a space to enter the date of one's first sighting. Page tabs and the species name are in the same colour; for example, red for flycatchers. Finally, the new Latin names of the 7th AOU Check-list are already incorporated, and, with a few minor exceptions, the sequence of species is that of the new check-list (though the change in the generic name of the Stilt Sandpiper was overlooked). This is an admirable achievement, since this field guide appeared only a month or two after the Check-list. Together, these innovations are successful, and warrant purchase of this book by almost everyone in western Canada. The keen birder will need an extra copy to keep in the glove compartment of the car.





Hanrahan, Christine. 1999. "Vancouver Birds in 1995, by Kyle Elliott and Wayne Gardner [Review]." *The Canadian field-naturalist* 113(2), 361–362.  
<https://doi.org/10.5962/p.358592>.

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