

For my taste, the "Habitat and Symbol Keys" that are supposed "to narrow possibilities in a particular era" and link sea mammals with "habitat" are not really helpful. Many whales migrate across habitats and the regular observer has no real way to tell "temperate" habitats apart from "cool temperate" ones. The meaning of the orange W habitat class presented for the False Killer Whale will likely remain a mystery to the reader because its meaning is unexplained in the guide. For pinnipeds, their "calls" and the mention of rookeries could have been helpful.

Overall, it appears that this "guide" is an excerpt of a better and larger guide book from the same author. It is useable in the field, but does not replace the real and classical guide books.

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Manitoba Birds

By Andy Bezener and Ken de Smet. 2000. Lone Pine Publishing, Edmonton, Alberta. 176 pp., illus. \$17.95.

I often wonder in which market book writers think they will sell their product. My first reaction to this compact little book, covering only 145 species (out of the official list of 406) was that it was too simple for most birdwatchers. And it probably is. Then I realized it was ideal for scout leaders. It gives a short, easy-to-read account of a bird's character, and a sentence or two on identification, size, status, habitat, nesting, feeding, voice, similar species, and the best sites in the province (to see the bird). An illustration and a range map accompany this information. This is just about the right level of detail for a scout leader teaching his troop about birds. It is also good for schoolteachers, new birders, and children. While it is intended for use in Manitoba, it would also be a useful guide throughout the prairies.

The introduction has a map of the natural regions showing the best 50 birding sites. A dozen sites have a short write-up that includes the most prominent bird species. I liked this addition to the text. I thought beginners and visitors would be able to use it as a starting point when organizing trips. Each account has a small illustration. While most of these are reduced (and reversed) versions from the main text, five species are different and not covered in the core section of the book. I counted 145 in the main text, so there is a total 150 species illustrated. These additional species, which this guide explains you can find most easily in the places mentioned, would be better included in the central body of the book (in replacement for some of the rarer or more difficult to see birds).

The authors claim the birds selected are the most common and easily found within the province. I question some of the choices. They have chosen, for

example, Burrowing Owl, a rare nester in the south west corner of the province and Screech Owl which nests along a narrow strip close to the U.S border (the range map for this owl seems a trifle optimistic). Yet they left out Hawk Owl, a widespread bird which nests over the northern three-quarters of the province. Birds seen easily in the north (Churchill) but not in the south, such as Bonaparte's Gull, jaegers, ptarmigan, and plovers, are also not included. Generally, though, I found the choices to be reasonable for the populated south of the province. I would be surprised if House Sparrow is not found at northern towns like Lynn Lake and Thompson (the range map does not suggest this.)

The illustrations by Gary Ross, Ted Nordhagen, and Ewa Pluciennik are, for the most part, very good. They generally show a typical adult in summer plumage. For some, but not all, species the differences between male and female are shown. Winter visitors are depicted in the appropriate non-breeding plumage. Many birds are shown in flight too. I was very impressed with the shape, attitude, and technical detail of each species. I did find a few that I thought could be improved (Warbling Vireo is too pale and Olive-sided Flycatcher is not heavily built or boldly coloured enough), but overall the quality is first rate.

This is a compact (14 × 21 × 1 cm) little book that will easily slip into a pocket or pack. The plasticized cover and high quality production suggests it should last well in the field. A quick colour-coded guide to the bird families on the back cover will also help out novices to find the appropriate text.

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