A Field Guide to North Atlantic Wildlife


This book arrived on the morning I left for Svalbard in the Norwegian Arctic. While the area covered by this book, offshore from North Carolina to Newfoundland, is some distance from Norway, the two areas do share a lot of wildlife. So I took the book along to make direct field comparisons.

I like the author’s concept for this guide. He has selected the most likely species you have some possibility of seeing on a pelagic trip or ferry crossing in the northwestern Atlantic. This includes the large “plankton” and algae, fish, turtles, whales, seals and seabirds. Only the more common species are included, enabling the authors to keep the book small [18 × 11 × 1.5 cm] and portable. This meant I was able to identify Beroe’s Comb Jelly, Fin Whale and Ivory Gull carrying only one guide. The guide does not include coastal species such as crabs, molluscs and inshore fish.

The descriptions are well written. For example, the text for Fin Whale is a version of the classic descriptions found in many guides. I compared this to a whale that circled the ship and the information given was accurate down to the details of the back chevrons.

I had far more problems with the illustrations. First there is no attempt to show scale. A 10-inch flying fish is shown as the same size as a 9-foot Hooded Seal. I found to see that there is a 5-inch difference in size. Similarly Glaucus and Iceland gulls. You need to check the text for Fin Whale is a version of the classic description, the most sane choice. He has taken the 10°C July

A Complete Guide to Arctic Wildlife


This is a comprehensive field guide to the birds and mammals of the Arctic. Author Sale describes the ecology and people of the region along with some Arctic history. He cannot avoid discussing both climate change and the threat of pollution. Short chapters on geology, geography and biogeography set the background. These are followed by the main text: a field-guide style section on the Arctic’s mammals and birds. The information provided covers identification, size, voice, distribution, diet, breeding and taxonomy. The guide is illustrated with photographs supported

by some field-guide style plates. Each species has a range map showing their circumpolar ranges.

I am always delighted to find a book that shows birds and mammals from a bio-regional perspective. Last summer I saw eight Snow Geese on the west coast of Svalbard – an unusual sighting. When you look at the distribution of the birds it is not hard to see how their expanding population could spill over the now unfrozen ocean a short distance eastward. This kind of perspective is difficult to reach when you use guides based on a political boundary (birds of Europe, Russia etc.)

The author’s first problem was the difficulty of defining the boundary of the Arctic. He uses, in my opinion, the most sane choice. He has taken the 10°C July