Book Reviews

Book Review Editor's Note: From this issue forward we will use the current currency codes. Thus Canadian dollars are CAD, U.S. dollars are USD, Euros are EUR, China Yuan Remimbi are CNY, Australian dollars are AUD, and so on. You will find these are the codes now used by financial institutions and internet currency converters. I will include an updated note for the next few issues as a reminder.

ZOOLOGY

Atlas of Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001 – 2005

By M. D. Cadman, D. A. Sutherland, G. G. Beck, D. Lepage, A. R. Couturier. 2008. Published by Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Nature. xxii + 706 pages. 96.00 CAD Cloth.

There's nothing like a good, hefty book to make reading in bed difficult; there's also nothing like a good, hefty book that's full of all the information it's supposed to have. This second atlas of Ontario birds is both. Like all recent atlases, this book has enough coffee-table appeal to be of interest to non-birders, and could in fact, entice them into the fold. This is not at the expense of the data, since the book typically presents the data thoroughly and well. I am very happy that Ontario (as most jurisdictions) chose to publish a book, and not a CD-ROM, as did Oregon…people will always be able to read books…CDs may already be on their way out.

Given that this is a second atlas for Ontario, the opportunity to compare results with the first atlas was there, and was used. The reader can see instantaneously whether 10 × 10 km squares (in southern Ontario) or 100 × 100 km blocks (in northern Ontario) have had a change in breeding status. This segues me to describe the regrettable, but unfortunately practical practice of giving less detail to the north than the south; being a native born-and-raised northern Ontario boy…this has always bothered me, but as stated, I see the practicality. What I don't understand, though, is the situation where the distribution of a bird like the Palm Warbler is shown as six squares on a large, and large scale southern Ontario map, even though the distribution of 99% of the population is shown on a smaller, and smaller scale, northern Ontario map. At least northern Ontario is covered, unlike the otherwise-fantastic Quebec atlas, which didn't attempt to describe birds in the northern two-thirds of that province.

This atlas has several important chapters of preamble, though, like the Alberta atlas, these are essentially limited to what is necessary to best understand the species accounts. Other jurisdictions have provided a greater diversity of introductory chapters to create an even more useful atlas – these include chapters on the local history of birding and ornithology, aboriginals and their relationships with birds, conservation, and others. Although not necessary, chapters like these would have enhanced the Ontario atlas.

Somewhere in the fleet of introductory chapters or appendices, one would have expected to come across a very basic piece of information – the number of squares in Ontario. There are tables in the introductory chapters and appendices which tell you the number of squares in which a species was found…obviously, without knowing the total number of squares, the former information is less valuable than it could be.

As with the Alberta atlas, each species account is given one double-page spread. This is convenient for the reader and allows for enough text, graphs and maps in most cases. It must have been an editorial decision to do this – surely some species could have done with three pages, without getting verbose. However, a two-page allotment does give a decent treatment to all. The accounts are divvied into appropriate subheadings in Distribution and Population Status, Breeding Biology and Abundance. A multitude of authors wrote these species accounts, and even so, I didn't find a single one lacking. All were well, to me extremely well, written – congratulations go to the authors, reviewers and editors of the species accounts. By using the multi-author approach, the workload is spread out and the project takes advantage of the areas in which these folks specialize.

This atlas incorporated point counts into its methodology as an important way to quantify many species. Very intuitive maps show the distribution of different population densities. By doing this, the third atlas will be better able to quantify population changes on the whole, as well as shifts in population centres and borders within Ontario.

In contrast, there are many other surveys from which information could have been incorporated into the atlas; not all species are effectively sampled using point counts. For example, the Ontario Nocturnal Owl Survey data could have been summarized for each of Ontario's owls; this would not have been a daunting task. The Breeding Bird Survey data, along with the

data from other sources, were incorporated into the Oregon BBA, to the overall benefit of atlas users.

There are some technical points to the data presentation that I did not find appealing or useful, though I will only mention the bigger ones here. For each species, there is a histogram which illustrates the probability that a person spending 20 h birding will encounter a species in a square from one of the five biogeographic regions of Ontario (and another bar illustrating the data for all of Ontario). On the y-axis are the labels for the five regions and the whole of Ontario; the x-axis shows the probability. There are two bars for each region, one for the first atlas, one for the second. Having both bars does give the reader a good idea of the change in abundance of the species. However, there are two issues with these histograms. The first is that the exact value of the probability is put at the end of each of the twelve bars…isn't that what the x-axis is for? For those very few people who need to know an exact value (e.g., a 59.9% chance of finding a House Finch in Lake Simcoe-Rideau) instead of the ballpark x-axis value of 60%, those data can be retrieved from the atlas project. For the rest of us, the data labels (made popular by many software packages) are simply so much clutter.

Secondly, regardless of the data, the x-axis is always calibrated in 20% increments, from 0-100%. That means, for species like the Ruddy Duck and Wilson's Phalarope, where eight of the twelve bars are at 1% or less, the reader barely sees the bars…why not scale the axis from 0-10% to show the data more effectively? This becomes ridiculous with birds like the Worm-eating Warbler and Northern Wheatear, which have some of the six categories blank, and *all* of the others with non-existent bars labelled at 0.0%.

Each of the species accounts features one photograph of the bird and sometimes a habitat and nest shot as well. The quality was from good to great… there were a few shots that I would have replaced, but nothing serious here. To increase the visual appeal, I would have included more habitat shots; both *The Birds of British Columbia* and *Birds of the Yukon Territory* had more of this, and I think that added quite a bit to those books [Neither of those books are atlases *per se*, but both do show distribution and breeding records]. A few photographers contributed many of the pictures, though overall there was a good diversity of photographers; that many peoples' works get featured is always good to see in a volunteer effort…so this is definitely a plus in my mind.

Finally, the cover photo. A Prairie Warbler? Really? Why? This bird was recorded in only 45 squares in Ontario — that's less than 0.5% of the total. If I were to ask you to name the best-known bird of the Yukon, what would it be? And yes, it's on the cover of their book. The widely-dispersed Red-tailed Hawk was a fine choice for the cover of the first atlas of Maritime birds. Surely something much more widespread and charismatic like their provincial bird, or one known to almost anyone who feeds birds in Ontario, like the Dark-eyed Junco, would have been more appropriate. The decision to have the very local Prairie Warbler as the coverbird just boggles my mind.

Overall my impression is that this is quite a good book that could have so easily become a great book. Ontario atlassers should be very satisfied with their second atlas – it largely presents the efforts of their long hours well; users of this book will be faced with a lot of information that is well-organized, and pleasing to read.

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The Return of Caribou to Ungava

A. T. Bergerud, Stuart N. Luttich, and Lodewiih Camps. 2007. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, Quebec. 2007. 586 pages. 49.95 CAD Cloth.

This is the most comprehensive book on Caribou ecology and predator-prey relationships that has appeared in many years, perhaps ever. Not only is the research seminal, but the authors systematically dismantle paradigms that have been in vogue for years. According to the authors, Caribou biologists have wasted the last 50 years measuring lichens on winter ranges, when they should have been documenting plant production on summer ranges. Wolves, along with human hunters, both limit and regulate caribou populations, not habitat. Food on the summer range only regulates at high densities and only after the range has been overgrazed. Wolves are driving Woodland and Mountain Caribou to extinction. Caribou populations where Wolves are absent maintain densities 100 times