

A Field Guide to North Atlantic Wildlife

By N. Proctor and P. Lynch. 2006. Yale University Press
P.O. Box 209040, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-9040
USA 221 pages. U.S. \$19.95 Paper.

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 [$18 \times 11 \times 1.5$ 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 an 18-inch species. This is a critical characteristic for look-alike species such as Glaucus and Iceland gulls. You need to check the text to see that there is a 5-inch difference in size. Similarly the Northern Seal plate shows the tiny 4 foot Ringed Seal as the same size as the 9 foot Hooded Seal. I found this disconcerting.

Some of the species shown are really cold water arctic animals. The North Atlantic is the southern fringe of their range. This is not mentioned for animals like Beluga, Dovekie or Harp Seal. I think giving their typ-

ical range would add perspective and could be said in few words.

The non-bird illustrations were very good. The artist has captured the short face of the Ringed Seal and the longer-nosed head of the Harp Seal very well. The fish portraits from the warm-water Dolphin [the fish] to the cold-water Cod are accurate.

The bird illustrations are another story. For example, the illustration of the Arctic Tern looks almost identical to that of the Common Tern. The Arctic has a shorter head and a longer tail giving it a different fore-and-aft look from the Common. The wing pattern is also quite different, having less black and giving the Arctic a much paler appearance. I had similar issues with other confusing pairs [Leach's and Wilson's storm-petrels, Glaucous and Iceland gulls, Audubon's and Manx shearwaters, etc.] Many other species lacked the subtle plumage differences that help confirm identification. For example, the two-toned grey on the wing of a Kittiwake and the armpit marks on the murre. Many birds are shown in winter plumage only. This is a reasonable approach as many birds disappear inland or north to breed. However, the winter Atlantic Puffin is very odd and the loon illustrations do not capture these birds at all well. It appeared that the artist did not have field experience with these species.

This is, however, a useful little book. If you are a novice I would recommend you take this book plus a modern bird guide on your pelagic trips. For more experienced bird watchers this book will suffice to remind you of the key points for what you may see and will be useful for all the non-bird species.

I thank Dr. Tom Smith, a fellow traveller, for sharing his immense knowledge of arctic wildlife, and thereby contributing to my review.

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A Complete Guide to Arctic Wildlife

By Richard Sale. 2006. Firefly Books, 66 Leek Crescent,
Richmond Hill, Ontario L4B 1H1 Canada. 400 pages.
\$49.95 Paper.

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