

## 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 × 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 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, Glaucus 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

isotherm, modified by extreme winter temperatures. This still leaves out some areas that I think of as “Arctic” such as James Bay and its Polar Bears and the northwest coast of Alaska with Belugas and Yellow-billed Loons. This, perhaps, proves that nature will never entirely fit into our human need for definitions.

Following his definition, the author then chose the species to be included as arctic birds and mammals. Here I am a little perplexed. He has, for example included Carrion Crow but not Black-billed Magpie (which I have seen at 63°N). He has only an introductory mention of the Gray Jay, which ranges to the shores of the Arctic ocean. Tree Swallow is given an individual account while the more northerly Cliff Swallow (I have seen it at 73°N) is merely mentioned as a rarity. I am also confused by the species he has decided to split and those he leaves as sub-species. For, example he has Iceland and Thayer’s gulls as separate species but not Mew and Common gulls. There seems to be better evidence to split the latter. Similarly you can question having separate entries for Black and Common scoters.

These are minor points and not as significant to my two major concerns. The species descriptions are detailed and clear and are some of the best I have read. While they are first rate, the author gives exceedingly spartan information on confusing species. This is in contrast to the descriptions, which often allude to an important field mark. For example, he states the three central tail feathers of the jaegers are “distinctive.” In the field separating a Parasitic Jaeger with a 9 cm tail extension from a Long-tailed with a 12 cm extension is not that easy. I well remember a controversial bird

that needed the late great Earl Godfrey’s talents to resolve as a Long-tailed Jaeger. Similarly the information on the Common and Hoary redpolls is not enough for field separation. There is no mention, for example, of the stubby bill of the Hoary – very evident in the nice accompanying photo.

My second point is that this is not a complete guide to wildlife. Unlike such books as Les Beletsky and Dennis Paulson’s *Ecotraveller’s Wildlife Guide to Alaska* it does not contain any information on plants, insects, marine invertebrates and fish or amphibians. Admittedly Beletsky only includes the commoner, more visible species although his title does say it is a complete guide, but he does include a broad spectrum of the wildlife, other than birds and mammals, visible to the naked eye.

While this is not meant as a coffee table book the photographs are really eye-catching. The bird plates are quite good, but I was less taken with the mammal plates. My chief reservation about all these illustrations is they frequently show only adult males.

I will take this book with me on my upcoming trip to the Pribiloffs. For the most part I will be seeing wildlife that I am familiar with and I will not carry a conventional field guide to the birds or mammals. This book will provide me with more encyclopaedia-style information about the creatures I am seeing. I will also take Beletsky and Paulsen’s book and a flower guide.

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## The Black Flies (Simuliidae) of North America

By P. Adler, D. Currie, and D. Monty Wood. 2004. Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen’s Park, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C6 Canada, and Cornell University Press. 941 pages. \$99.95 US.

This is a huge book. It is huge in size, filling 941 pages. It is huge in scope, treating the biology, management and identification of the entire black fly fauna of Canada, the United States, and Greenland. And it is huge intellectually, the culmination of many decades of work by an enthusiastic international community of researchers, among whom the authors of this book are prominent members.

In the preface, Peter Adler states that the book is “geared to a general readership.” I would not have guessed that this was true, at first glance, but after some perusal it seemed to me that the book would be useful from about the undergraduate level on up. The writing is clear and precise, but the vocabulary will be daunting for most people without biological training. I suspect that the book will find a place in almost all scholarly libraries, and that the specialists who will use it most probably ordered a copy before it came into print. But there is a wider audience for the book as well, and in

this regard I predict that it will be a required reference for many decades to come. The authors mention its relevance to medical and veterinary entomologists, aquatic biologists, environmental consultants, systematists, naturalists, pest management specialists and students, but I suspect the real list will be longer than that.

The text is arranged in four parts, covering background information, biology of black flies, economic concerns, and systematics and taxonomy. The first part provides an overview of the subject, a very readable history of the study of black flies (with lovely historical photographs) and a chapter on techniques for collecting and curating black fly specimens. As an entomologist (with no particular interest in black flies, I’ll admit) I nonetheless found this section very interesting.

The second part of the book deals with the biology of black flies, and consists of a fine treatment of the structure of these insects (and their immature stages), as well as a well-written overview of their cytology. Black fly cytology was pioneered by the late Klaus Rothfels, a man deeply missed by the authors, and who they refer to as “friend, mentor, and phenomenon.” A chapter summarizing the life history and behaviour