

Birds of the Untamed West: The History of Birdlife in Nebraska, 1750 to 1875

By James E. Ducey. 2000. Making History, [but released for review in 2002]. 2415 N 56th Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68104 USA. 300 pages. U.S. \$25.00. Paper.

This book is a valiant attempt to report the ornithological history of Nebraska to 1875. commendable strengths include Chapter 1, which discusses the bird knowledge and lore of the native Americans, the Lakota, Missouri, Otoe, Omaha, Pawnee, Ponca, and Winnebago tribes. Native language bird names are provided when available. Chapter 2 provides a summary of historic explorations, most of which were made by men merely passing through the state while heading farther north and west. Many of these explorers came through in autumn, after the bird breeding season was over. Exceptions were Lewis and Clark, in Nebraska from 11 July to 8 September 1804, and Thomas Say with the Major Long expedition, present from 19 September 1819 to 6 June 1820. Chapter 3 provides a succinct account of the early bird habitats, and Chapter 4 tells which species were found in each of these habitats. Ducey provides, in square brackets, occasional corrections of obviously misleading statements in Aughey's 1877 paper. The list of references I found impressive. Thirty-three early illustrations add to the interest and attractiveness of the book.

For each observation, the name of the current Nebraska county is provided in upper case letters: "shouting" in modern computer parlance and to me a bit annoying. Unlike Robert E. Stewart's North Dakota book, Ducey does not provide a map showing the location of each county, forcing the reader to provide himself with a Nebraska state map before reading very far.

Before listing the shortcomings of Chapter 5, the last half of the book, I chose to use Myron Swenk's historical articles in *Nebraska Bird Review* (in the late 1930s)

as a veracity check. I was not too surprised to find that Swenk had, in the late 1930s, provided more detail and better documentation than Ducey. If one takes the Lewis and Clark expedition as an example, Swenk used a not excessive seven pages, including a map showing the progress day by day, consulted original, primary sources, and gave more detail about extant diaries of several members of the expedition. As a further check, I compared the four-plus pages of Nebraska citations in Gollop's Eskimo Curlew monograph with Ducey's account, which again was less complete.

Chapter 5, a List of Species, occupies 110 pages; it lists excavated faunal remains from various forts and Indian camps, and is a useful compilation that leads the reader to original sources. Sadly, Ducey fails to place the verbatim accounts of each species in the explorer's words, indicated by quotation marks or a different font. As a result, one can rarely differentiate fact from Ducey's speculation, extrapolation, and "best guesses." His terminology and presentation are inconsistent, especially concerning whether an individual species is a migrant or a resident, and whether or not there is specific evidence of breeding. His use of "migratory species" is a less satisfactory term than "migrant." Far too often, the term "potential breeder" is used without evidence of dates or localities for eggs or young. Clearly, a conventional publishing house would have provided the outside editorial assistance that this book lacks. The index is incomplete.

In spite of my caveats, especially the idiosyncratic presentation of the species list, anyone interested in the history of ornithology in Nebraska will find much of interest in this inexpensive book.

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Birds of Nebraska: Their Distribution and Temporal Occurrence

By Roger S. Sharpe, W. Ross Silcock, and Joel G. Jorgensen. 2001. University of Nebraska Press, 233 North 8th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68588-0255 USA 520 pages. U.S. \$69.95. Cloth.

This book is a nearly ideal state bird book, a scholarly compilation of sightings and specimens, with careful assessment of questionable sight and specimen records. Subspecies receive detailed and precise attention. There is helpful information about the best spots to search for each species. Good use is made of data from Breeding Bird Surveys and Christmas Bird Counts, but only sporadic use is made of banding recoveries. The price is kept low by omitting paintings of each bird species, a feature of more sumptuous state books. Four maps are useful for locating counties, but one must consult the Gazetteer (which fails to include Pine Ridge) to locate specific towns, parks, refuges and other geographic features.

The introduction deals with geography, geomorphology, aquatic systems, and climate, and then describes each of the main environments. The history of Nebraska ornithology is given in ten succinct pages, while another six tell how to use the species accounts, emphasizing the key importance of the Distribution and Ecology section for each species; sadly, the reader is not alerted to the list of abbreviations in Appendix 1.

As might be expected in such a book, there is a wealth of intriguing information, especially about range extensions and both increases and decreases in populations; commendably, the maximum number of individuals seen at one time is provided for most species. Other items that caught my attention were: Gray Partridge spread into Nebraska spontaneously from South Dakota and Iowa after much earlier attempts to introduce them directly had failed; most Ruffed Grouse disappeared by the 1880s, and it is now listed as an

extirpated species; a Clapper Rail caught in a mink trap in January was the farthest inland record, the nearest being Tennessee; several hundred Buff-breasted Sandpipers followed a farmer working a field; a Cliff Swallow colony contained 3700 nests. There is a useful warning about reliance on vocalizations to separate the Eastern from the Western Wood-Pewee. The authors also mention a population of chickadees in the Wildcat Hills that resembled Black-capped Chickadees morphologically, but sang Mountain Chickadee songs.

Regrettably, lower priority is given to nest records as compared to sightings, although the latter are of lesser biological importance. Only a relatively few species have data from the Cornell Nest Card Program, with detailed numbers and dates of nests. For some other breeding species, dates and localities of nests, eggs or flightless young are not provided; we can only guess that in some cases they were not available, but surely for at least the Mourning Dove and Yellow-headed Blackbird they were simply omitted. No list of host species for Nebraska is provided for the Brown-headed Cowbird.

It would have been helpful to place unaccepted records within square brackets and add abbreviations for journals at the top of the list of references. The

subspecies account for the Great Horned Owl is incorrect since the wapacuthu race of the Great Horned Owl has been discredited. The account of the Poor-will is misleading, implying that the Flint Hills are in Nebraska, whereas they are in Kansas. Mention is made of a Golden Eagle nest with four young without comment that this may be the first such record in the North American literature, though observations of two Golden Eagle nests with four eggs have been published previously.

My minor criticisms aside, this is an excellent summary of what is known about Nebraska birds. The state is important for the number of its bird species (415 with a specimen or recognizable photograph, 13 with a description acceptable to the state committee, and 5 extinct or extirpated), and because it is the meeting place for many closely related species which overlap in range and sometimes interbreed. Birds of Nebraska is a substantial and welcome addition to ornithology in general and to state bird books in particular.

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Canadian Skin and Scales: A Complete Encyclopedia of Canadian Amphibians and Reptiles

By Pat E. Bumstead. Illustrated by Norman H. Worsley. 2003. Simply Wild Publications Inc., 100 Lake Lucerne Close SE, Calgary, Alberta T2J 3H8 Canada 161 pages. \$24.95.

Although subtitled “a complete encyclopedia” this book obviously was never intended to be so pretentious, but instead to serve young naturalists’ as a “first book”. The cover, with bright colour photos of a Horned Lizard (Stephen Glendining), Plains Garter Snake, Western Painted Turtle, Northern Leopard Frog, and Tiger Salamander (Brian Woltski), will attract them. Any suspected western bias is soon dispelled by the content, which is spread evenly across Canada. Black-and-white sketches by Norman H. Worsley depict all Canadian species and a selection of extra-limital representatives of families. Many are adequate, some good, but others are barely recognizable (e.g., the wrinkled Spotted Salamander on page 25 and Black Rat Snake on page 124), and one is clearly the wrong selection (the Ensatina on page 32 of a southern pattern not occurring in Canada).

The pedagogical style begins with “Canadian Creatures”, covering communal activities, wintering, being dark, food resources and hibernating sites, and advantages for those reptiles bearing young (in Canada, two lizards and 13 snakes) rather than laying eggs. Province-by-province species lists follow. Chapters 2-9 deal with amphibians in general, salamanders and newts (21 species), frogs and toads (25), reptiles in general, turtles and tortoises (14), lizards (5), and snakes

(24). Each family and each species which occurs in Canada is an individual account. Those for families give world and Canadian species totals, world range, characteristics, and reproduction. The species accounts include common and scientific name, a paragraph of introduction, colour, reproduction, “where do they live” (habitat and provinces), and a “did you know” section. A series of questions with reference to the page where an answer can be found are at the bottom of many of the pages in this section. Chapter 9 deals with Conservation and includes definitions for status categories and species thought to be extirpated in Canada (Timber Rattlesnake, Pacific Pond Turtle, Pygmy Horned Lizard, Pacific Gopher Snake, Eastern Tiger Salamander). Nine threats to others are listed from habitat loss to introduction of exotic species. A “you can help” section presents ideas for group and individual participation. A final chapter, “Etcetera”, covers diagrams of forms and features, the availability of a teachers guide, and a list of Canadian internet wildlife links, words to know, published and internet resources used, and a five-page index. Finally, there is a note from the author and a short biography of the illustrator.

Although primarily concerned with Canada, the text erratically adds extra-limital filler statements such as that Mudpuppies “have been introduced in large New England rivers” or that Western Skinks have been found on islands off the coast of California. For the geographically challenged it is not made clear that species listed for “Newfoundland” are those for the political entity