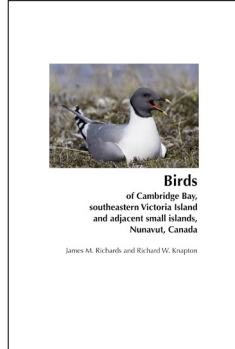


ORNITHOLOGY

Birds of Cambridge Bay, Southeastern Victoria Island and Adjacent Small Islands, Nunavut, Canada

By James M. Richards and Richard W. Knapton. 2025. Alula Press. 232 pages and 123 colour photos, 9.99 CAD, E-book.

This richly coloured volume is fittingly dedicated to the memories of David F. Parmelee and George M. Sutton, two Western scientists who ventured to Victoria Island in what is now Nunavut to record bird sightings and collect specimens during three summers in the early and mid-1960s. Authors Richards and Knapton summarise their own observations and those of several other settler visitors, including Alf Erling Persild (from 1949) and Canadian Wildlife Service biologists led by Jennie Rausch (from 2023). Together, these provide the basis for an overview of regional bird abundance and status over a period of nearly 75 years. Many eBird observations were also used. The book includes detailed descriptions of all recorded birds, including visitors and accidentals. Notably, the number of species from the book's identified region has increased from 68 to 125 since the earlier findings of Parmelee and Sutton. The reason for this is because of increased coverage and range expansions from a warming climate, the authors explain. This discussion, provided in an appendix, could have been added to the main text of the book.



Birds of Cambridge Bay begins with three well-written introductory chapters by Robert Montgomery covering breeding habitats, the history of ornithology in the region, climate, and weather. I especially appreciated his fulsome descriptions of various breeding habitats accompanied by excellent photographs. The book then moves into species accounts. Each one follows a standard format, including distribution, abundance, phenology, breeding (if there is evidence thereof), whether there are subspecies, and a short description of the species' occurrence on Jenny Lind Island (now Qikiqtaryuaq), a small island southeast of Cambridge Bay where researchers and visitors have conducted fieldwork over the last 70 years.

The species accounts comprise the largest section of the book. There is some repetition (e.g., in nearly every account with observations from Richards there is the exact phrase "Richards visited Cambridge Bay 14 times between 1990 and 2016...", including pp. 28, 32, and 35). The abundance of each species is

estimated but without the context of where and when these estimates were made, so these should not be used as local population sizes. Sometimes statistics or observations of subspecies identity are mentioned without a citation (e.g., 20% of Snow Geese are blue morph, Common Eiders nesting on Victoria Island are from the Pacific subspecies) and, although I found the book quite accurate, there are some minor inaccuracies (e.g., the *rufa* subspecies of Red Knot has a larger non-breeding distribution in Nunavut than in South America; Niles *et al.* 2012). While most accounts for breeding species in the book's area include habitat descriptions, there is none for Red Knot, a species for which a very small number of nests has been found across the Canadian Arctic, and for which a description might have been helpful for those studying this declining shorebird. Although Appendix 1 provides estimates of abundance (common, uncommon, rare, irregular) and status (breeds, resident; breeds, seasonal; visitor; accidental; suspected breeder) these would have been more helpful as codes next to the species accounts. The many appendices include the raw observations that were used to write the accounts.

The book's Forward, written by Victoria Johnston, a long-time resident and biologist of northern Canada, expresses enthusiasm for the book's content but also bemoans the fact that there was little attempt to use local knowledge to understand the avifauna of this region. This is a shortcoming that I also found, despite each species account providing a local name, if known. The introduction suggests that readers have a field guide handy when using this book. To me this suggests that beginner birders are the intended audience, and maybe those who come to Cambridge Bay on cruise ships who would like to know more about the local birds. I think the book (in electronic format) would serve these visitors well. Many species accounts have accompanying photographs. As someone very appreciative of the shorebird avifauna in Canada's Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, I thought it was nice to have this important group of birds well-represented in high-quality photographs. While the names of the photographers are always mentioned, dates or locations are sometimes missing. A list of contributing photographers is provided, although most photographs are those of Richards.

Some interesting surprises were that the Cambridge Bay region is an excellent place to see breeding of all three jaeger species and three species of breeding

loons (Yellow-billed, Red-throated, and Pacific). All three loon species have been caught (as by-catch) in fishing nets and often with associated mortality. Barn Swallows are considered a rare breeder in Cambridge Bay. An appendix listed all known banding records from the region, although, surprisingly, there appear to be no recent efforts to band birds there, despite the presence of a well-equipped new research station in Cambridge Bay: the Canadian High Arctic Research Station (CHARS). On numerous occasions Redpolls were recorded nesting in discarded Christmas trees from local businesses. Savannah Sparrows, while recorded singing and also seen many times, have never been confirmed as a breeding species.

There are minor errors in the text. Several species names need to be updated to reflect recent taxonomic decisions, such as Hudsonian Whimbrel (*Numenius hudsonicus*), American Herring Gull (*Larus*

smithsonianus), and Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*).

Overall, I enjoyed this book and recommend it as an E-book to those who are travelling to this accessible location (albeit with expensive flights). Trips to Cambridge Bay provide opportunities for anyone interested in birds to see both Low and High Arctic ecozone species with relative ease.

Literature Cited

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