

I was rather disappointed by the book, mainly because the Whooping Crane sections are so dominant in it that I had a feeling the rest of the species were almost an after-thought. The family is a rather homogeneous one, so treating the natural history of the birds as a group is reasonable, but the two-page summaries are just that – summaries – and the illustrations in them are inadequate given the scope and size of the book. In fact, the pictures in general are not up to the standard one expects from a book of this type. Many of the ones in my copy are a little off, lacking sharpness, and some are no more than cropped versions of pictures that appear earlier.

The text is rather uneven. Some parts are rather plodding. The author lapses periodically into jargon and then, for those who might not understand, pops in a

brief explanation. Why use the term in the first place? At its best, however, it is well-written, even eloquent, especially in sections discussing the plight of cranes. The Whooping Crane history is given in considerable detail, even to the extent of outlining the events leading to the formation of the Audubon movement.

Those seeking a comprehensive treatment of the world's cranes will find this book wanting. If you are interested in the fascinating account of the collapse and gradual recovery of the Whooping Crane in North America, coupled with an overview of cranes generally, then this could be a good book to acquire.

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Marine Mammals of the Pacific Northwest: A Concise and Comprehensive Waterproof Guide

By P. A. Folkens. 2001. Harbour Publishing, P.O. Box 219, Madeira Park, British Columbia V0N 2H0. 8 pages. 9.95 CAD – (synthetic film).

The increasing development of the whale-watching industry has resulted in the demand for, and creation of, books and identification guides for sea mammals, seabirds and the marine ecosystem. In this regard, and looking back on a history of whale-watching for over 90 years, the coast of British Columbia has received most of the publication activity in Canada.

Despite its catchy title, this guide by Pieter Arend Folkens is more a leaflet of a guide. It consists of three text pages and five pages of drawings and photos full of information for the whale watcher in the field. Although the leaflet is printed on “waterproof, UV resistant synthetic film made from a 100% recyclable, environmentally inert material containing no forest products (similar to milk jugs)”, the user might actually have difficulties using it on an offshore whale watching trip during periods of stronger wind or higher waves; the light leaflet could easily fly away and the small print is hard to read when on a rolling boat. However, the compressed text gives a nice summary and overview on 31 sea mammal species in the area; it even mentions Steller's Sea Cow, which was hunted to extinction by 1768. In addition, major whale watching locations in British Columbia and Alaska are named, but none are reported really for Oregon and Washington (as the title would imply).

Most of the eight pages of the field guide are devoted to drawings and to fine pictures from the author and several others. The reader might find the distinction between *Mysticetes* (Baleen Whales), *Odontocetes* (Toothed Whales) and Small Cetaceans a little unclear from the arrangements of the drawings. Very helpful and informative is the page about “Common visible behaviours and terms” allowing to link sea mammal sightings to a classified set of behaviour types. Helpful also is that images of fluke displays are presented for species that are known to show such a behaviour.

Even the body sizes of newborn sea mammals are given. All measurements are made in SI units, and the conversion factor for feet is provided.

Of interest to the general audience might be the section “Marine Mammal Watching Guidelines”, also presented on the web <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/mmviewingguide.html> (Note that the old URL www.nmfs.gov/prot_res.html and given in the guide was updated). In addition, contact addresses and a web address (revised to <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/strandings.htm>) are given for sightings of stranded sea mammals (Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 800 4654336; or the Whale Reporting & Stranding Line 800 665 5939).

As found in many other field guides, the text suggests some field marks and details for species identification and separation that normal whale watchers might not be able to apply, or which are not really realistic. For instance, Sei Whales are supposed to be differentiated from Fin Whales by a fin angle of over 45 degrees; male Beaked Whales (genus *Mesoplodon*) ideally can be identified by the location of teeth and jaw line (which is for most of the time covered by the ocean); phocids (true seals) differ from otariids (Sea Lions and Fur Seals) by their hair and small nails on their foreflippers. Overall, features like these might be very hard to recognize for the untrained as well as for the trained observer, particularly when observations are done for moving animals, from a shaky boat far away and with binoculars. Rather than focussing on classical small-scale features, outlining the use of proportions and shapes could be more useful for telling species apart. Counterproductive for a field guide might be the point that Beaked Whales, the species group that lacks most knowledge on distribution and where whale watchers could indeed contribute greatly to science, are described as the “most difficult whales to identify correctly”; no further help or details are given for the interested whale watcher. For my taste, the “Habitat and Symbol Keys” that are supposed “to

narrow possibilities in a particular area" and link sea mammals with "habitat" are not really helpful since many whales migrate across habitats anyway and since the regular observer has no real way to tell "temperate" habitats apart from "cool temperate" ones. The meaning of the orange W habitat class presented for the False Killer Whale will likely remain a mystery to the reader because its meaning is nowhere explained in the guide. For pinnipeds, their "calls" and the mentioning of rookeries could have been helpful.

Reptiles and Amphibians of Canada

By Chris Fisher, Amanda Joynt, and Ronald J. Brooks. 2007. Lone Pine Publishing, 206, 10426 – 81 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 1X5. 208 pages. 18.50 CAD.

It has been 24 years since the first comprehensive one-volume guide to all Canadian amphibians and reptiles known at the time appeared (Cook 1984) and that is now badly out-of-date and, fortunately, out-of-print. There have been new guides to several provinces since and a highly popularized superficial attempt for the entire country by Bumstead (2003).

For this new effort, only the third author, the legendary Ron Brooks of the University of Guelph will be very familiar to most Canadian herpetologists. Brooks has long been a CITES committee member and crusader and has made an extensive ecological contribution with a legion of graduate students conducting studies at Algonquin Park and selected central and southern Ontario sites. These have produced new insights into the lives of turtles and aquatic frogs in eastern Canada and one especially endangered snake (the Blue Racer). The other two authors have BScs from the University of Alberta. Chris Fisher is a writer of wildlife articles and field guides and lecturer on wildlife. Amanda Joynt, an ecologist from the Okanagan Valley, was a technician with Parks Canada and Canadian Wildlife Service, followed by writing full time for Lone Pine publishing, ecological surveys including rare plants in South Dakota, and direction (2004-2006) of Children in Wilderness Malawi, southern Africa. She now is a biologist for Fisheries and Oceans Canada in Inuvik, Northwest Territories.

The book is traditionally organized and opens with the mandatory acknowledgements, including one to Ron Brooks, odd in that he is also a coauthor. There is a very useful "Species at a glance" which gives a miniature reproduction of the text illustration, species by species, together with size, and account page number. The 12-page Introduction briefly highlights the antiquity of the groups and their characteristics. A map plots the location of selected national and provincial parks in Canada. This is followed by a summation of major habitats from the temperate west coast to the Maritimes, a discussion titled "the good, the bad and the misconceptions", and another on the general harmlessness of most species as well as the negative aspects of keeping native species (not the least of which is that

Overall, it appears that this "guide" is an excerpt of a better and larger guide book from the same author. It is useable in the field, but does not replace the real and classical guide books.

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in most provinces, is illegal to keep many species except under permit from resource departments). A few words on conservation are followed by the headings used in the species accounts. The latter are the bulk of the book (150 pages) and cover both native and introduced species: 11 freshwater or terrestrial turtles and 4 marine ones, 7 lizards, 26 snakes, 21 salamanders, and 25 frogs (including toads and treefrogs, etc.). Three of the turtles and are introduced or likely so, and two of these probably no longer occur, one lizard is introduced and one apparently extirpated, and one snake (Timber Rattlesnake) is extirpated.

Each species account is dominated by an enlarged colour drawing of an adult, and these vary from very good to embarrassingly bad. Some of the snakes, turtles and frogs are among the excellent, some salamanders and virtually all the lizards are poor, the latter particularly washed-out, among other faults. The Common Garter Snake represented seems to be a particularly odd colour pattern (a Pacific region variant?) that will be unrecognized in most of the country. The Plains Garter Snake is very pale, typical of the southern and eastern portions of the range mostly beyond Canada, while the "Eastern Ribbon Snake" on the next page matches the majority of Canadian specimens of plains species. In Canada, Ribbon Snakes rarely have an orange dorsal stripe (I know of only one report) like the one pictured; the lateral stripe is usually prominently bordered below by chocolate, and overall it is more slender. Among other snakes particularly poorly done are the Red-bellied, Brown, and Green snakes. The species accounts themselves lead with English and scientific names followed by a casual informal introduction, then a paragraph ID (identification), and one or two lines on Length, Distribution (with a tiny map of Canadian range), Habitat, Activity Patterns, Reproduction, Food, Similar Species, French Name, and a Did You Know sidebar, the latter focussed on some additional fact regarded as particularly remarkable. Each native and existing species is given two facing pages. The marine turtles (designated "vagrant species") fare even less well, with only a half page each, and the introduced or extirpated ones only somewhat better at one page each. The format of necessity means that only the briefest information can be given for each. Sometimes these have little Canadian relevance. An example is the statement