
BOOK REVIEWS

HOW TO BE A BETTER BIRDER

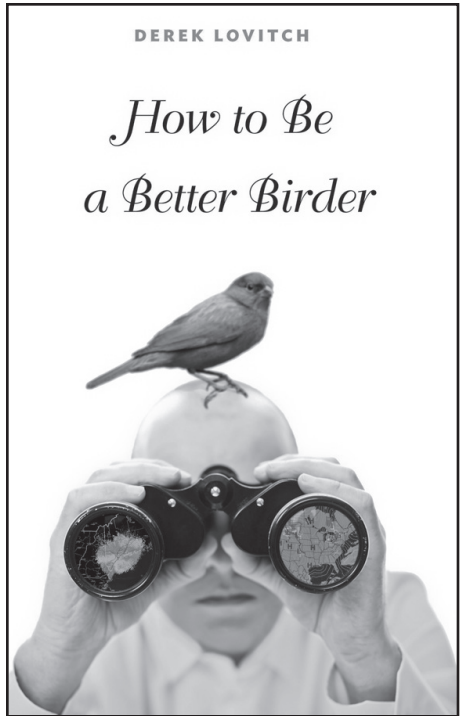
DEREK LOVITCH. 2012. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. Paper: \$19.95 US. ISBN: 9780691144481. 208 pages. 15.2 by 22.9 cm. 53 colour illustrations. 10 maps. Reviewed by ROB WARNOCK, e-mail: warnockr@accesscomm.ca.

This book examines eight complementary approaches to improve one's birding skills. They include the use of advanced bird identification, habitat geography, and weather, birding at night, birding with a purpose, vagrants and patch listing. The eighth chapter is an interesting case study from New Jersey where the author tested these eight tools by birding with experts across New Jersey in the fall of 2009. These tools do work!

I particularly like the first chapter where the author stresses the whole bird approach and the use of habitat and geography in bird identification and not totally rely on field marks that may not be always visible to the birder. The next three chapters on habitat, geography and weather are well done and provide practical ways how habitat, weather and geography information can increase birding success. I learned more about weather and how it can affect migration patterns and ultimately birding success. Birding at night is about the fascinating use of radar to track the nocturnal migration of birds and not just looking and listening for owls.

Birding with a purpose provides some opportunities for birders to contribute directly to ornithology and conservation through field studies, Birding Bird Surveys, breeding bird atlases and Christmas Bird Counts. The author recommends birders to contribute their sightings to eBird, an online database where researchers can study bird populations and distributions.

The author provides useful information about vagrants and where and when they



are more likely to occur. Patch listing is a handy way to practice one's birding skills. A patch is a local and accessible birding location where a birder can easily and regularly practice birding and collect detailed information about birds. The author stresses the enjoyment and fun of birding and getting field practice in honing one's birding skills throughout the volume.

The text is easy to read with a storytelling approach and minimized use of technical jargon. Careful use of maps and excellent illustrations enhances the text throughout the book. Use of numerous examples from the author's extensive birding

experience in eastern North America and other locations strengthens the book. These birding tools are truly applicable to any region where birds exist.

In addition to the handy table of contents and index, there are the text box lists of recommended sources of reputable additional information for each major topic so the reader can easily do further research on each topic discussed in the book. These resource lists are a key strength of this book. Instead of burying these text box lists in each chapter, it

would have been better to place them in a separate chapter for them so the reader can find them more easily. He does warn that not all online resources are reputable or created equal and the birder must exercise caution and judgement while using online resources.

Although this book assumes the reader has some birding knowledge and experience, I recommend this excellent book to anyone looking to significantly improve their birding skills by expanding their birding 'toolbox'.

PRAIRIE: A NATURAL HISTORY. NEW EDITION

CANDACE SAVAGE. 2011. Greystone Books and the David Suzuki Foundation, Vancouver BC. 320 pages. 19 cm by 22.5 cm. ISBN: 978-1-55365-588-6. Softcover. \$34.95 CDN.

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