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BIRDS OF CANADA

Tyler L. Hoar, Ken De Smet, R. Wayne Campbell, and Gregory Kennedy. 2010. Lone Pine Publishing, Edmonton, AB. Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-55105-603-6. 528 pages. 15 × 22.9 cm.

The Lone Pine *Birds of Canada* provides an account of 451 commonly occurring Canadian species as well as an appendix of 39 rare and accidental species. The book organizes commonly occurring species according to a standard sequence of evolutionary descent, as well as 23 different page-colour groupings. The top margins of the pages are uniquely coloured based on these groupings and are labelled by the group of birds represented. A corresponding coloured tab on the outside margin of each page is linked to the contents page, and to the back cover for quick referencing. All 451 species are presented in a reference guide section in the beginning of the book, which provides a small illustration, common name, page number, and corresponding group colour.

The Introduction has some very good sections on where to bird in Canada and ways to get involved in birding. The authors highlight some of the top places to bird in Saskatchewan and suggest a few that are less well known. The Introduction describes migration, classifications of birds, techniques of birding, and ways to attract birds to bird feeders or nest boxes. The last pages of the Introduction provide a detailed description for the species account template contained within the book, which I found to be very helpful. Although the book provides a good and useful diagram illustrating bird topography, it is unfortunately hidden in the back of the book in the Glossary, rather than in the Introduction.

Each species account has a large and detailed full-colour illustration accompanied by a colour photo in the bottom corner of each page along with a seasonal distribution map. The illustrations can include breeding and non-breeding plumage, occasional in-flight perspectives, as well as differences between sexes. However, some accounts had incomplete representations of different morphs for certain species, such as the ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*). Most of the illustrations are placed near the outer margin of the page, which makes them easy to find while flipping through pages. Each species account has a brief overview describing interesting facts, unique identifying features for the species, unique behaviours, and conservation concerns. The main section of each account covers identification, size, habitat, nesting, feeding, and similar species.

The identification section, when appropriate, describes differences between adult, immature, and juvenile plumages, or between females and males. One criticism is that the descriptions can be moderately technical for beginners. For example, the species account for the chestnut-collared longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) describes this bird as having a “chestnut nape” and “...black central and terminal feathers”. The words ‘nape’ and ‘terminal’ were not listed in the Glossary, nor where they mapped on the bird diagram. This may make interpretation of the descriptions somewhat more difficult for novice birders.

The size, habitat, nesting, feeding, and voice sections provide the necessary details required for most birding activities. The sizes describe approximate bill-to-tail length and wingspan in metric measurements. The habitat section provides details on breeding habitat and occasionally migration or wintering habitat. The habitat descriptions are generally succinct and accurate, although some species have more specific details than others. The nesting section provides a concise overview of nest location or structure, as well as clutch size and incubation, while the feeding section addresses all food habits across the spectrum of birds. The voice section was unique in its attempt to describe behaviours associated with songs, calls, or alarms. Some of the song descriptions were useful, while others did not provide an accurate representation of the song. The diversity of calls made by a species was limited for some species. For example, the piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) could be represented by more than “a clear whistled peep peep peep lo”. The section on similar species does an excellent job of identifying commonly misidentified species, as well as providing key differences and page numbers for those species.

The most similar book available to the Lone Pine *Birds of Canada* is a volume of the same title published by Dorling–Kindersley (DK),¹ which has 435 full-page profiles of commonly occurring species within Canada along with shortened profiles of rare or vagrant species. The DK book presents species with full-colour enhanced photos along with key identification features listed on the photographs. Extra details offered by this publication include taxonomic classifications from order to species, descriptions and diagrams of flight patterns, weight, lifespan, and conservation status. However, this book is

not suitable as a field guide, as it is much larger than the Lone Pine edition.

In comparison, the Lone Pine *Birds of Canada* appears to be superior in writings of overviews for species accounts. I found more unique details available about birds, such as “...nomadic” tendencies of short-eared owls (*Asio flammeus*), or the recent nesting of piping plovers on the “Canadian side of the Great Lakes”. However, I think the dense overviews restrict the book’s ability to be used as a field guide, with no key identifying features for birds being identified with the illustrations. The Lone Pine *Birds of Canada* provides an easily accessible habitat section, whereas the DK book does not. Lastly, the photographs in the Lone Pine edition are larger and of higher quality.

The Lone Pine *Birds of Canada* has the appearance of a field guide but is limited due to its size and identification sections. It does provide informative species accounts with well written narratives and generous full-colour illustrations. This book is well suited for amateur birders as a potential home or vehicle guide to complement your current field guide. The book is also well suited as an education tool in classrooms or libraries for those interested in learning more about birds. I would recommend this book to birders for the information contained within the book and the species accounts as well as the detailed illustrations. I would suggest the Lone Pine *Birds of Canada* as a home guide to life history of Canadian bird species. However, as a home guide for Canadian bird identification, I prefer the DK *Birds of Canada*, which is typically sold at the same retail price.

1. Bird DM (consultant ed) (2010) *Birds of Canada*. Dorling–Kindersley, Toronto, ON

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