

The Blue Jay Bookshelf

BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA—A GUIDE TO FIELD IDENTIFICATION. By Chandler S. Robbins, Bertel Braun, and Herbert S. Zim. Illustrated by Arthur Singer. 1966. Golden Press, Inc., New York, N.Y. 340 pages. (7½" x 4½"). \$2.95 (U.S.).

Good field guides to birding, on this continent, have been available for some time. Indeed, for almost 20 years, the identification of birds in the field has been greatly simplified by the Peterson series of field guides and Pough's Audubon bird guides. The principle of emphasizing characters recognizable in the field, on which these books are based, is now taken so much for granted that we do not realize how much more difficult it was a generation ago for the ordinary bird watcher to identify an unfamiliar bird. Nevertheless, every birder greets with curiosity a new bird guide that covers his area. Now, in the popular Golden Guide series, there has appeared a Golden field guide to the birds, prepared by an imposing team of experts—Chandler S. Robbins, Chief of the Migratory Non-game Bird Studies Section of the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife (U.S.A.), and familiar to *Blue Jay* readers who submit migration records, for his work at the Patuxent Refuge; Bertel Braun, an enthusiastic European amateur ornithologist and bird bander, now working on a popular guide to the birds of Europe; and Herbert S. Zim, editor of the popular, educational science series of Golden books, and editor of Oliver Austin's *Birds of the World*. The artist responsible for the many hundreds of coloured illustrations of birds in this new field guide—birds in characteristic poses in their typical habitat, birds in flight, birds in silhouette, is Arthur Singer, acclaimed as one of today's foremost painters of birds, who has produced, for example, the illustrations for *Birds of the World*.

The authors point out that this book "attempts to compress basic

identification data into a single pocket-size volume . . . an effort to improve the ease and accuracy of field identification for the amateur as a first step toward behavioral, ecological, and other studies of birds." This commendable statement shows the respect which these dedicated ornithologists have for the work of the amateur, work which may go far beyond simple listing of new birds seen.

The new Golden guide covers all species of wild birds likely to be found north of Mexico, considering them in three groups—breeding birds, regular visitors, and casual visitors (that is, by the authors' definition, occasional migrants of which there are at least five North American records for the present century, e.g., the Corn Crake and Lapwing from Europe). For us in the Great Central Plains, this one volume happily combines land and water birds from both eastern and western North America.

The following aims, although not all explicitly stated, seem to have been of primary concern in the production of the guide:

1. To make available at a modest price a guide to all of the birds on this continent north of Mexico *completely* illustrated in colour, and in suitable pocket format (soft, but rugged cover; price, \$2.95).
2. To call attention to characteristic postures as an aid to identification. (The key picture of many birds shows them in typical pose in their usual habitat, or often in characteristic movement; for example, Sprague's Pipit is pictured walking through the grass, Sanderlings running along a sandy beach, and hummingbirds sipping from flower-throats).
3. To provide scientific descriptions of the birds' songs. (This is done, for the first time in a field guide, by means of "sonagrams." The sonagram is a visual reproduction of a sound pattern, electronically made by a sound spectrograph. The diagrams in

this book are photographs of sonagrams, most of them from recordings made in the field by Chandler Robbins. Basically, the graph shows the variations in frequency and pitch that characterize each bird's song. To many bird watchers, this incursion into the mysterious world of electronics may seem formidable; in any case, it looks as if one would have to spend a little time becoming familiar with the system before finding it useful.)

4. To make simultaneously available, once the field guide is opened at the correct page, all the information needed (or provided) for bird identification and understanding—textual description, coloured illustration, and indication of range. (This is done most ingeniously: short texts describing each of several species of birds appear on the left hand page, each accompanied by a small map of North America indicating the distribution of the species, and on the right hand page coloured illustrations of the species appear in the same order, exactly opposite each textual description.)

The authors' own experience of birding in the field has made them especially conscious of the practical requirements of a bird guide. Hence the distribution maps by which range is immediately indicated, the length measurements given in terms of field measurements of live birds rather than of study skins, the full-page colour plates that help to elucidate difficulties of identification (two pages of female ducks in flight, two of hawks in flight, two of the winter plumage of smaller shorebirds, two of immature gulls, two of the head markings of wood warblers, two of immature fall warblers, two of the head and breast markings of sparrows), and the silhouettes used to indicate family types. Sometimes, however, the technical execution of the idea is not adequate, as for example in the colour coding of the map of North America showing vegetative regions, where there is a poor correspondence between the chart colours and the area colours (at least

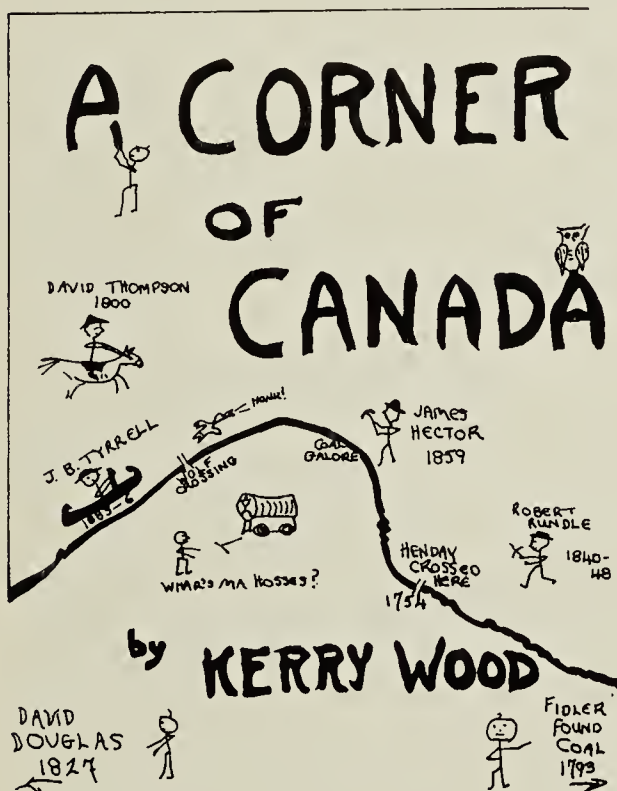
in the copy I examined). Again, in some of the very small coloured sketches the essential character of the bird is lost—for example, in a little sketch of kingbirds attacking a crow, neither the kingbirds nor the crow are recognizable.

Sometimes, of course, the very terseness of a statement in words or in paint can be misleading. A Great Crested Flycatcher is sketched nesting in a mailbox—are we to think of this species as following civilization like the Starling? The Burrowing Owl is said to be the “owl of the plains, locally common, usually nesting in prairie dog ‘towns’”, but this does not tell the whole story of its distribution. On the whole, however, a most commendable effort has been made to place each bird in its proper setting. The authors keep insisting that we do not simply look for pin-pointed field marks, but that we try to see the whole bird in its appropriate environment. This is indeed one of the pleasurable features of the Golden guide.

One aspect of this really quite scientific guide will be a surprise to many. The common and scientific names are from the A.O.U. *Check-list of North American birds*, 5th edition, 1957, but the order in which the species are listed does not follow the *Check-list* exactly. The authors explain that their guide follows the usual “natural” or evolutionary order, i.e., progressing generally from the least to the more advanced families of birds, *with minor departures to set up comparisons*. For example, all the white herons are grouped together, and all herons have been placed next to the cranes, thus facilitating comparison and identification of somewhat similar, though unrelated, birds. Within the families, too, the A.O.U. *Check-list* order is not necessarily followed: for example, among the grebes, the Western comes first; the sandpipers begin with the Long-billed Curlew, Whimbrel, Eskimo Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Hudsonian Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, then proceed to an arbitrary group of “upland sandpipers”, namely, Upland Plover, Buff-

breasted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper and Wandering Tattler, then to "medium-sized waders", "rock shorebirds", "peeps" and "phalaropes." These departures from the usual *Check-list* order are mainly arbitrary re-arrangements designed as aids to identification and understanding, and there is certainly merit for many of them (though the Western Grebe placement still puzzles us). However, inasmuch as most local check-lists follow the A.O.U. *Check-list* order (as do the Peterson and Pough bird guides), this will cause some confusion and will involve a little more effort in making cross-references from this new field guide to other books and lists.

An examination of this newest field guide to birds, with its several distinctive features, makes one eager to get out to "field-check" it.—*Margaret Belcher, Regina.*



A CORNER OF CANADA. By Kerry Wood. 1966. John D. McAra Ltd., Calgary. (Autographed copies are available from the author, Box 122, Red Deer, Alberta, Canada at \$3.00 a copy).

Readers who have joined Kerry Wood on previous adventures in the

Red Deer country of Alberta will find more delightful tales and reminiscences awaiting them in his Centennial project, *A Corner of Canada*.

Kerry Wood arrived in Red Deer in the year 1918 with all the enthusiasm of most young lads and with a much greater curiosity about his surroundings and the colourful neighbourhood personalities which he met. This curiosity soon led him to adventures and observations which will delight the naturalist, the historian and the young-in-heart who can still join in on long rambles and share the joy of the "high-sky jingle of a Sprague's pipit song".

Have you ever had the thrill of finding a dinosaur fossil such as you could find along the bed of the Red Deer River or found the nest of a peregrine falcon as your boat took a turn between steep banks? Have you ever been a member of a local secret society or had the problem of cooking five hundred pounds of beef in a pit? If you have not been so fortunate, I would recommend that you try these adventures with Kerry Wood.

This story is almost as good as a personal introduction to Mr. Wood, his family and the country that he knows and describes so well. Perhaps when you have finished this book you will want to make your Centennial project a visit to this corner of Canada.—*B. M. Rever, Biology Dept., U. of S., Saskatoon.*

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF SASKATCHEWAN. By Francis R. Cook. 1966. Sask. Museum of Natural History, Popular Series No. 13, Regina, Sask. 40 p. Illus. \$0.40.

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF SASKATCHEWAN is a booklet designed to provide a non-technical guide to the 19 species of amphibians and reptiles of the province. Mr. Cook, who is Curator of Herpetology at the National Museum of Canada, has spent several years conducting a survey in the prairie provinces of these often neglected members of our fauna and is particularly well qualified to discuss them.

Each species is illustrated and given a separate account. The black and white illustrations, from meticulously prepared water color paintings by Ralph Carson and Fred Lahrman, add considerably to the text. The account for each species is divided into four sections: Recognition—in which the distinguishing characteristics of the species are described; Comparisons—where contrasting characters are given for species which might be confused with the one under discussion; Range in Saskatchewan—in which the known distribution in Saskatchewan is given; and Natural History—where interesting data on life histories, habitats, etc., are briefly presented. In addition there is information on amphibians and reptiles in general, conservation, and methods of collecting and preserving specimens for scientific study.

The booklet is authoritative and easy to use. It is a welcome addition to the natural history literature of the province. A heavier cover would have made it more durable for use in the field, and it should be included on any field trips take in Saskatchewan.—*W. H. Beck, Regina.*

THE LEGEND OF GRIZZLY ADAMS. By Richard Dillon. 1966. Coward McCann Inc., New York. 223 pages. Illustrated in black and white. Cloth, \$5.00.

Grizzly Adams has been called the most famous of the mountain men and is frequently referred to by American writers for his adventures and colorful character. Mr. Dillon, who is the librarian of the Sutro Library in San Francisco, has produced an interesting, well written book which gives the reader the background story of this man of the wilderness. Grizzly Adams was one of the many New Englanders who learned a trade in the Eastern States and then "went West" to try his luck in the wilderness, which was then most of California. Adams was bankrupt on a number of occasions and decided that he liked life in the bush much more than living in the towns, and so he lived on his own or with the Indians in the Sierra Nevada

and other parts of the coastal mountains. He took a particular interest in killing or capturing grizzly bears, from which he got his nickname. Apart from killing many by shooting them with a single shot rifle or Colt revolver, he frequently stabbed them to death, though getting bitten in the process; such an experience caused his death. Mr. Dillon points out that his stories, and the number of times that he was at death's door with a grizzly, wolf or cougar at his throat make any reader wonder if some myth might remain in the legend.

Grizzly Adams' reputation rested upon his wild adventures, his many animals, and his appearance. He was instrumental in establishing the San Francisco and New York zoos, and his grizzly bears were a popular sight, as were the rest of his menagerie of cougars, wolves, elk and other animals which he had tamed. He helped to interest the public of Pre-Civil-War America in natural history, and stories of Indians, coastal mountains and the Gold Rush era are all side-lights which add to the incidents. By going West, Grizzly Adams made a niche for himself in history and his wilderness adventures will always be remembered and recalled.—*Tom White, 1-2105 Cornwall, Regina.*

BENEFACTOR DIES

Dr. C. M. Goethe, Sacramento, California, who had given us frequent donations which he always referred to as "a widow's mite" died recently at the age of 91. Dr. Goethe and his wife spent most of their lives and considerable money in philanthropic work. Dr. Goethe is credited with starting the first playgrounds in the United States. He was an enthusiastic conservationist, starting a nature guide system in the national parks, and scattering millions of poppy seeds along roads and railways in an attempt to keep California beautiful. He wrote regularly to officers of the S.N.H.S. praising the *Blue Jay* and encouraging us to greater efforts in conservation. It is with regret that we note the passing of this great friend of man and nature.