

THE BIRDS OF ALBERTA

With their ranges in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

W. R. SALT and J. R. SALT. 1976.
Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton.
512 pp. \$10.00

This is the best single volume there is on birds in the Prairie Provinces. The emphasis is on Alberta species — breeding and migration distributions and periods for the more common birds and individual records for rare ones. However, the breeding ranges of Saskatchewan and Manitoba species found in Alberta are also given on small but adequate maps and the boundary localities are usually named in the text. In addition, there is a paragraph on plumage, on field identification, on nesting (site, material, clutch size and egg colour), on range (world-wide and wintering) and a section on habits, ecology and migration — for a total of one page of text per species. There is also an excellent half-page colour photo or painting of each species.

Presumably because the junior author, the geographical scope and the publisher are new, the text makes no reference to two earlier versions of *The Birds of Alberta*.^{8 9} However, comparisons are appropriate; even the publisher's advertisement points out that 258 of the photographs are new from the second edition. This book lists 333 confirmed species, including four substantiated for the first time in the fall of 1975; this is 12 more than in 1966 — allowing for species that recently have been officially combined into one and split into two. One species — Long-tailed Jaeger — has been relegated to the Hypothetical List. The print is slightly smaller, permitting the inclusion of material for two additional provinces in the same space as before. Most of the text is new. Instead of giving only an average figure for length, the new volume gives a range and repeats it in metric units.

There has been no skimping on the species covered by maps, e.g., there is but one record of a Scarlet Tanager in

Alberta but a map with its breeding range in southeastern Manitoba is given. It is difficult to evaluate maps, if only because one author's interpretation of occurrence between widely scattered documented records may be as good as another's. Very new published and unpublished data has undoubtedly been incorporated into the Saskatchewan and Manitoba ranges are apparently drawn from records described from Godfrey, for the most part.² However, Saskatchewan readers should find that at least one species breed beyond the range shown for their province: Broad-winged Mergansers nest 150+ miles further southwest to just north of Meadow Lake,¹ Nashville Warblers breed farther west at Nipawin on the River, and about 100 miles north of Meadow Lake,^{4 7 6} and Canada Warblers breed south to near the Saskatchewan.¹⁰

Because the area has been explored, the status of a species no longer appears at the top of each species account. Gone also are the terms "scarce" to "common" in the breeding ranges.

This reviewer agrees with two major criticisms made in both earlier reviews of the *Birds of Alberta*: the absence of reference material to substantiate records and the inclusion of a check-list of subspecies.^{3 5} I also question the value of the breeding paragraph (except for measurements) describing plumage. The authors admit that the book is not a field guide. Beginners will be frustrated trying to learn their birds from it but, if they try, they will get more out of the illustrations than from the text. Unfortunately, the reader is given no advice on what to use for field identification because there is no reference to field guides. Neither are there references to *The Birds of Canada* or to any of the regional bird clubs or societies where help and more information could be obtained.

With the report of a Canyon Wren in the Milk River Valley, I would have expected to see this species on the Hypothetical List.¹¹ More copies of purchasers are being supplied with

rection slip for the two photos on page 478, where the captions have been reversed.

In view of the problem of locating place names, it seems unfortunate that the maps inside both front and back covers are identical. One might have been crammed with the more important place names and the other with ecological zones, lakes, rivers, etc. There may be a place-name error under Sharp-tailed Sparrow (p. 448): Cypress Lake is listed as being in central Saskatchewan and is not included in the species' breeding range.

What the shortcomings of the book are not serious is evident from the fact that I have personal copies at home and in the office and gave two Christmas presents. *J. B. Gollop, 2 York Ave., Saskatoon, Sask. S7J*

GODFREY, W. E. 1950. Birds of the Cypress Hills and Flotten Lake Regions, Saskatchewan. Nat. Mus. Canada Bull. 20. Ottawa. 96 p.

²GODFREY, W. E. 1966. The Birds of Canada. Queen's Printer, Ottawa. 428 p.

³HOUSTON, C. S. 1959. The Birds of Alberta (Review). Blue Jay 17:43-44.

⁴HOUSTON, C.S., and M. G. STREET, 1959. The birds of the Saskatchewan River — Carlton to Cumberland House. Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc. Publ. 2. Regina. 205 p.

⁵NERO, R. W. 1967. The birds of Alberta, revised (Review). Blue Jay 25:41-43.

⁶RANDALL, T. E. 1962. Birds of the Kazan Lake region, Saskatchewan. Blue Jay 20:60-72.

⁷RAWSON, D. S., E. C. HOPE, J. MITCHELL, and E. W. TISDALE, 1943. The Big River Survey. Univ. Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. 37 p.

⁸SALT, W. R., and A. L. WILK, 1958. The birds of Alberta. Queen's Printer, Edmonton, 511 p.

⁹SALT, W. R. and A. L. WILK, 1966. The birds of Alberta. Queen's Printer, Edmonton. 511 p.

¹⁰Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History. 1956. Birds of Madge Lake. Blue Jay 14:53-54.

¹¹SMITH, W. W. 1972. Milk River valley, Alberta, brief explorations. Blue Jay 30:49-51.

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