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AUDUBON SOCIETY'S VIDEO GUIDE TO BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA

SUSAN DRENNAN, Editor. 1988. Vol. 5 (Songbirds II — 109 species of warblers, orioles and blackbirds, tanagers, grosbeaks, finches, buntings and sparrows). Produced by Nature Science Network, Carrboro, NC 27510. 80 minutes. \$41.00.

This is one of five volumes covering 505 species of birds. The jacket claims that "In each volume, **moving and still pictures** show each bird's marking and behavior; **computer-animated range maps** communicate breeding and wintering areas for each species; and **bird-calls and sounds** from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology complement informative narration and stunning visuals." (Boldface as on jacket.) This review is based on my impressions of the treatment of 62 species found in the Saskatoon area after going through the tape three times and on the comments of eight other people who saw it once.

This video does not take the place of field guides but it does have two big advantages over books: a species' song is heard as the bird is seen, and some of its behaviour can be studied, e.g., and Ovenbird's tail-pumping, a meadowlark's

flight technique, and how a Black-white Warbler works a tree. The narration is good.

Most species are shown for 2 seconds, some longer, some shorter. Plumages only are shown — a breeding male and, usually, a female or young. Videos vary considerably in quality: only 2 of the 109 species warrant the adjective "stunning." Too many show birds too far away to be of value; some show birds from angles less than ideal for identification; others present significantly obstructed views; many are not in true colour (including white epaulets on male redwings), and others are blurry, though not enough to prevent identification. Thirteen of the 62 species are shown only on slides and most of these are off-colour — too pale, too dark, too blurry — or not sharp. Zooming in and out of them is not an improvement. In some cases stop-action is used to prolong the view of a moving bird.

The same flock of distant blackbirds is shown for red-wings and yellow-heads; neither is useful for identifying the species. One wonders if the "ferocious" Brown-headed Cowbird is not, in fact, an immature bird. It is also interesting to note that at least one view of a Tennessee Warbler shows a faintly striped breeding plumage characteristic not shown in any of the field guides checked. ^{6 7 8}

bird songs are usually dubbed but are occasionally from the bird in view. These realizations are not as useful as those on recordings because only one bird is heard and it usually has an eastern dialect. One could do better to study pictures in a field guide while listening to songs of a warbler and finch recordings made over to the Prairie provinces.^{1 2} The Ashopper Sparrow is shown giving its song which I have heard only once 10 years of birding on the Prairies. The sparrow's song is not familiar.

The maps are drab. Canada is medium grey, the USA is dark grey and the coasts are shaded, a degree of detail that makes it difficult to find narrow coastal ranges. In addition of provincial and state boundaries would have been a much more detailed detail. Maps are shown for about 10 seconds, not always long enough in a viewing to find small winter ranges. They are dark blue on the dark background.

Species occurring in the Saskatoon area are missing include: Connecticut and burning warblers; Clay-colored, LeConte's and Sharp-tailed sparrows, McCown's and Smith's longspurs, Hoary Redpoll. Typographical errors include 4.5 in. as the length of a White-throated Sparrow (instead of 6.5) and, in print, "White-winged Crossbill."

With their three photographic field guides to birds, the Audubon Society has honored this endeavour without the technology to do the job.^{3 4 5 9} For too many species, the plumages as filmed are good enough for identification, and many plumages are not shown. Fully, a subsequent edition of this set is under way and will be a vast improvement over this version.

Saskatoon Natural History Society is reviewing this volume to determine whether it would purchase the remainder of the set. (It will not.)

¹ BORROR, D.J. and W.W.H. GUNN. [n.d.]. Finches. Sounds of Nature Series, Vol. 6. Fed. of Ontario Naturalists, Don Mills, Ontario.

² BORROR, D.J. and W.W.H. GUNN. 1985. Songs of the warblers of North America. 2 cassettes or records. Cornell Lab. of Ornithology, Ithaca, N.Y.

³ BULL, JOHN and JOHN FARRAND, Jr. 1977. The Audubon Society field guide to North American birds. Eastern region. Knopf, N.Y. 775 pp.

⁴ FARRAND, JOHN, Jr. (editor). 1983. The Audubon Society master guide to birding. Three volumes. Knopf, N.Y. 447, 398, 399 pp.

⁵ FARRAND, JOHN, Jr. 1987. An Audubon handbook. Three volumes. McGraw-Hill, N.Y. 317, 496, 496 pp.

⁶ PETERSON, R.T. 1980. A field guide to the birds of eastern and central North America. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 384 pp.

⁷ ROBBINS, C.S., BERTEL BRUUN and H.S. ZIM. 1983. A guide to field identification. Birds of North America. Golden Press, N.Y. 360 pp.

⁸ SCOTT, S.L. 1983. Field guide to the birds of North America. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C. 464 pp.

⁹ UDVARDY, M.D.F. 1977. The Audubon Society field guide to North American birds. Western region. Knopf, N.Y. 855 pp.

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NEWFOUNDLAND BIRDS: EXPLOITATION, STUDY, CONSERVATION

WILLIAM A. MONTEVECCHI and LESLIE M. TUCK. 1987. Publication 21, Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge, Mass. 273 pp., illus. colour and b/w maps, cloth \$10.50 U.S.

This ornithological history is a model for all other provinces to follow. Based on forty years of work by the late Leslie M. Tuck, it describes the geography, geology and ecology of Newfoundland, the utilization of birds by prehistoric inhabitants, and the history of both the birds and birders of Newfoundland. There are long chapters on seabird colonies, patterns of landbird diversity (in a province where less than one percent of the area has been cleared for agriculture and urban development), and a superb chapter on conservation and preservation. Particular attention is paid to documented changes in numbers and distribution of bird species over the centuries.

The authors give careful attention to the early writers who mentioned Newfoundland birds, and later collectors and observers, and they have devoted painstaking attention to determining the first, second, third, fourth and fifth specimen record, sight record and breeding record for each species.

Appendix II provides local vernacular names for most species but unfortunately both authors' names and localities are used in parentheses with no way for the reader to discern which is which. Montevicchi and Tuck give "twillock" as an early name for the Greater Yellowlegs, without mentioning possible confusion with "willick" or "willock," early names for the guillemot and puffin. There is an excellent bibliography, but no index.

I found only six typographical errors and two errors of fact. P.A. Tave played a pioneering role in bird banding in the United States, not Canada. "Inuit" is already a plural word and "inuit" therefore incorrect.

This attractive, interesting, well-written, hard-cover book is a bargain. Reviewed by C. Stuart Houston, University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8

WOMAN BY THE SHORE AND OTHER POEMS A tribute to Louise de Kiriline Lawrence

ROBERT W. NERO. 1990 Nature Heritage/Natural History Inc., Toronto, Ontario. 64 pp. Soft cover \$9.95.

A book of poems by ornithologist, naturalist and well-known Great Owl researcher, Robert W. Nero, is a tribute to Canada's nature writer and naturalist Louise de Kiriline Lawrence who was friend and inspiration to the poet. The verse is complemented by nature drawings of James A. Cameron. Royalties from this book are being donated to the Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Writers Award which is being established to encourage excellence in nature writing.