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## A BIRDFINDING GUIDE TO THE REGINA AREA

CHRISTOPHER I.G. ADAM, THOMAS B. RIFFEL, ROBERT A. LUTERBACH and ROBERT H. KREBA. 1985. Special Publication No. 16 Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Box 1121, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4P 3B4 80pp. Paper \$4.00.

Saskatchewan's first regional birdfinding guide is, appropriately, for the Regina district. Often, the initial impression of the cultivated plains is of a region poor in species, whereas a richness of birds is to be found — if one is told what to look for and where, when and how to find them. This is the guide's aim. The four authors are from Regina's very active and respected corps of birdwatchers.

First, visitors and newcomers are offered suggestions for timing trips and hints on clothing, equipment, maps, brochures, country travel, contacts, accommodations and the weather. A briefing on the avian setting notes the birds typical of the primary habitats — farmlands, wetlands, grasslands and woodlands — and spotlights 47 prairie species the visitor will most likely want to see.

The well-coordinated and specific route descriptions and map delineations are a blessing — the stranger's frustration level should be minimal. Equally valuable is the keying system identifying birding sites and integrating text, maps and Specialty Locator (the appended section

on 120 most desirable species and where to locate them). Truly handy. Confining attention to selected species and prime bird places is another plus (only the appended status and abundance table, which includes all 316 reported species, departs from this focus). Sidestepping a pitfall in too many guides, routes are self-contained, reasonably short and direct, each serving only a few bird sites. (Just once is there departure from this principle, to the guide's detriment).

Reflecting the characteristics of prairie lands and the intensive cultivation on the Regina Plains, only four of the recommended birding spots are on vestigial grassland. Twenty-one are in natural prairie discontinuities — sloughs, lakes, valleys, creeks, coulees — and 31 are in man-made impoundments and urban settings. Both sorts of discontinuities concentrate species and numbers of birds, especially during migration. The surprisingly rich birdlife includes rarities, unusual stragglers and huge flocks, in addition to the species indigenous to the prairies. Certain concentration points are well known among local birders: the city's "Warbler Alley," Buck Lake with its flocks of Snow and Ross' Geese and shorebirds, Last Mountain Lake and its unusual arctic water birds.

This guide does not cover the same area as Margaret Belcher's *Birds of Regina* (1980); a third of the guide's 45 birding places are in the Qu'Appelle and Last Mountain Lake valleys although Manley Callin's *Birds of the Qu'Appelle* (1980) is not included in the bibliography.

The described route to Nicolle Flats is by back roads through the the Qu'Ap-

pelle Valley. Though more picturesque and interesting than by highway, it is longer (77 km or 48 mi.) and slower, and Nicolle Flats takes time to cover. The authors state that the trip makes a long day. The route could have been split, or reversed. The Specialty Locator has some curious errors or omissions in its Nicolle Flats column; for example, Black-headed Grosbeak is not on the list, thrush - only Veery is listed as present, shrikes and Burrowing Owls are given no status as present (the route description gives a colony location for the owls). Nicolle Flats is a first-class birding place, comparing favorably with the province's better known Emma Lake, Cypress Hills and Last Mountain Lake, it warranted more attention than it received.

From my experience with Burrowing Owls I disagree with the old saying that Burrowing Owls "sometimes dig their own burrows," that is given in the annotated list. Also, my survey of this owl's population in 1977 indicated more birds were found in the region northwest of Moose Jaw than in the area south of Regina which the authors state is the area where most are to be found.

The directions for the "Lily Field" southeast of the city omit to mention that the vantage point faces east and during early morning birding, the observer is likely to be working against the morning sun.

Regrettably the reproduction of the 14 habitat photographs is sub-standard. The bird sketches and photos are a welcome artistic touch, though weakened by poor reproduction. Fortunately, neither deficiency directly reduces the guide's usefulness. Where compactness is a virtue, the guide is larger than necessary in some cases through waste of space in layout. The maps are quite usable, but ease and confidence in reading them could have been even better had the printer proffered advice on contemporary

graphics techniques.

This booklet is a useful information source and a practical guide. Visitor and resident, old-hand or neophyte, should find it a pleasure to use. Some of the routes would be interesting scenic trips for the non-birder, and the birding descriptions and species commentary would be enjoyable reading for the arm-chair birder. — Reviewed by *Jim A. Wedgwood*, 610 Leslie Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7H 2Z2

## THE WONDER OF CANADIAN BIRDS

CANDACE SAVAGE 1985 Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Foreword by Roger T. Peterson. 30 x 25 cm (9 x 11 in.) 211 pp., 100 color photos, hardcover \$35.00.

Western Producer Prairie Books continue to publish superb books, this being one of the most glorious. How is it possible to come up with yet another "coffee-table book"? This one goes far beyond most and it will be treasured by all who get their hands on a copy. Begin with a gifted writer, a person who looks at birds with joy in her heart, but realistically, and with whimsical humor. Then search throughout North America for the most exciting photos available, and voila! a book of revelations, a book that will inspire the most blase birder or layman. Savage has brought together some of the best and most unusual photos taken by 35 top-notch bird photographers. Many of the photos are full page, all are exceptional, some are instructive. The full page photo of a Great Gray Owl (by Wayne Lankinen) captures the elegant solemnity, the calm, almost disdainful look, the feathery lightness of this imposing bird. It would be difficult

to surpass the photo of the nighthawk at its nest, wings raised over its back, the Audubonesque view of two Black-billed Cuckoos ("a lean, lissome, brown-backed bird gliding among the shadows of the underbrush") at their nest; one bird holds a bristly caterpillar in its bill, a nestling with mouth agape reveals on the roof of its mouth "curious, snow-white disks with roughened surfaces." And where did she find those three stunning Redwing photos?! Blast her — I should have had those for my Redwing book! For the rest of the photos, get a copy of the book and see for yourself what hard work and careful selection can do. You won't be disappointed. These photos will stun, please, surprise and make you yearn for spring and summer and the wonder of birds.

Not an ornithologist, not really a birder, Savage conveys her view of these creatures of flight with uncanny skill (and long, hard work, you may be sure). By carefully reading a lot of material (there are 23 pages of references sorted by species), sifting through it with fresh insight, pouncing upon the unexpected, she brings us new impressions of birds. Not so much their identification as their *identity* — herein lies the value of her sometimes child-like responses to what birds do. She is fascinated by their behavior and while she imbues birds with liveliness, with character and personality, she rarely anthropomorphises. When she describes bird behavior in terms of human antics or values, it is not without some realistic and valuable comparison.

Of owls, she writes: "Creatures of the night and 'owl light,' they fly and hunt with confidence where we could only jitter and stumble about." Of the Kingfisher: "... chances are the bird will see you first. Uttering a harsh rattle of displeasure, it will likely swoop along the water's edge, giving you a chance to notice its distinctive white collar and heavy-headed, touseled silhouette." Of

songbirds: "Yet, mysteriously, we are moved by their beauty [of song]. What, we may wonder, is the basis of the ancient kinship through which we and the songbirds share our interest in pitch, rhythm, dynamics, and other components of melody?"

One can only speculate on the anguish with which the author confronted the task of choosing 55 representative birds out of some 550 that are found in Canada. It is a successful choice, covering birds of 18 major groups or *orders*. It would be interesting to do a survey to see how many "favorite birds" have been included. Behavior, biology and ecology are the three main themes, and these are well covered for every bird order and species. There is a lot of information, some old, some new, all carefully woven together and dealt with in an entertaining and enthusiastic way. It is good reading. Fun, really.

Writer, editor, journalist, musician and now a civil servant, Candace Savage is one of that group of observers of nature who occasionally reach out and gather in a new harvest of seashore, woods, streams and always, birds — and we are the better for it. There is laughter here, hope and inspiration. An exotic combination, born of love of people and wildlife.

Don't, please, discard the dust jacket of this splendid book, else you'll lose a choice photo of a Bohemian Waxwing about to engulf a freshly-plucked crabapple still in mid-air (back cover; the Blue Jay on the front cover is included in the book). Worse, you'll lose a charming photo of the delightful author herself. — Reviewed by *Robert W. Nero*, 546 Coventry Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba. R3R 1B6