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BIRDER'S GUIDE TO SOUTH-WESTERN MANITOBA

C.W. CUTHBERT, J.I. HORTON, M.W. MCCOWAN, B.G. ROBINSON and N.G. SHORT. 1990. Published by authors. 100 pp., illustrated in black and white, maps, photos, drawings. (14 x 21.5 cm) \$8.00, paperback. ISBN 0-920436-37-4.

This is a neat book, describing the best birding areas in Manitoba from Riding Mountain National Park to the U.S. border and from Saskatchewan almost to Portage La Prairie. It also provides a checklist of birds, the dates they occur and a monthly indication of abundance. Birders now have site guides for all of southern Manitoba, this one complementing the "Birder's Guide to Southeastern Manitoba."¹

The introduction describes the landscapes of the region. "When to come" devotes 13 lines to a monthly account of highlights. Birders wanting to know when they might see as many species as possible will appreciate a statement advising that the largest number occurs in May (207 ± uncommon to abundant species) with June, July and August close behind (193-195). There are also sections on where to stay, weather and what to wear, helpful publications (including field guides), and local contacts.

The birding sites begin with four in the city of Brandon – an excellent feature. Maybe the next edition could designate city birds in the "Species List." Four routes out of Brandon and seven country sites follow. Each is described in terms of its habitat, access and a selection of species that may be expected – usually from 25 to 50. There is a map for each area and photographs of eight sites.

The maps are excellent, although an area map showing where the 12 regional maps fit in would be helpful to the reader. In spite of a warning about "roads ... without gravel" being impassable when wet, more often than not road surfaces are not specified.

"Specialties of the Region" occupies eight pages and covers 43 species, giving habitats and locations for each. "Specialties" are not defined. They include species that are rare, uncommon and common in the region and some that breed from coast to coast in Canada and into the United States. Had these pages been set up like the rest of the book, more species and other information could have been included.

The "Species List" occupies 19 pages, the first being a legend. This is followed on the left pages by bar graphs for 249 species, showing abundance month by month and breeding status in the area. The facing pages contain brief comments on breeding habitats and locations for some birds and on migration sites for others. In the legend, two categories, "Occasional" and "Accidental," have the same symbol (repeated from the southeastern guide).

The six abundance categories are compiled from a somewhat conflicting set of criteria: relative abundance (e.g., abundant, uncommon) is the primary designation; this is followed by opportunity to see a species (e.g., on all visits, less frequently) and by the number likely to be seen (e.g., often larger, unusually low). Such a system apparently assumes that the opportunities to detect a species varies only with its abundance, regardless of habitat, behaviour, size and colour. This apparently causes problems, e.g., where Ospreys nest, they are likely to be seen on the "majority of visits" ("Common"), even though they are

“Rare” in their “preferred habitat.” While Red-eyed Vireos may be detected “on all visits” (abundant), it is difficult to visualize them as “Abundant,” as Snow Geese are designated for spring and fall. Likewise, Great Horned Owls are in the same abundance category spring through fall as some ducks, that occur in staging flocks of hundreds.

Source of data do not indicate whether annual population information – Breeding Bird Survey, Christmas Bird Counts, government and Ducks Unlimited surveys of waterfowl and upland game birds – were used in determining relative abundance.

A book encouraging people to look for birds might well have included a code of ethics. Along the same line, users should have been warned of the fragility of some species by noting those that are officially designated (federally and provincially) as endangered, threatened and vulnerable.

The index is a useful addition, partly because it serves as an indirect site directory for species.

The above criticisms are minor compared to the usefulness of the guide. It's the only way to go – to southwestern Manitoba.

1. CLEVELAND, J.N., C.W. CUTHBERT, G.D. GRIEF, G.E. HOLLAND, P.A. HORCH, R.W. KNAPTON, R.F. KOES, N.F. MURDOCH, W.P. NEILKY and I.A. WARD. 1980. Birder's guide to southeastern Manitoba. Eco Series 1. Manitoba Naturalists Society, Winnipeg, MB. 58 pp.

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WITH PTARMIGAN AND TUNDRA WOLVES

CY HAMPSON. 1991. Orca Book Publishers, Victoria, British Columbia. 140 218

pp., 65 photographs (Colour and black and white) \$16.95 ppb.

Have you ever yearned to see the birds, mammals and flowers of the Canadian Arctic but feel you cannot make the trip and probably never will? Cy Hampson's new book *With Ptarmigan and Tundra Wolves* will take you there, and to places the most exotic tourist trips will never reach. It contains seven chapters describing the adventures of Cy and his wife, Mary, with Willow Ptarmigan, Grizzly Bears, loons, geese, Tundra Swans, whimbrels and many other plant and animal species on the Anderson River delta of the western Arctic through spring and summer. This is followed by five chapters on the author's adventures with a party of scientists on Bathurst Island. This part contains some marvellous descriptions and photographs of the life cycle of sanderling, Musk Oxen, Arctic Hares, Rock Ptarmigan, as well as vegetation and terrain. Geographically, Bathurst Island is about 15 degrees latitude from the north pole at about 100 degrees west longitude. Readers will find the account of visits of Cy and Mary with naturalists and other friends thoroughly interesting too.

This book is made more readable by the incidental descriptions of sights and sounds of various species or terrain that accompany the main animal or bird under consideration in a particular chapter. For example, here is one of Cy Hampton's observations from Anderson River: “About halfway back, two pale short-eared owls were seen, flapping lazily over the willows with deep, slow wingbeats. One of them drove toward the other nearly brushing its wings, and the soft resonant, closely spaced courtship notes *too-too-too-too-too* drifted back on the stirring north breeze.”

Here is a second example about birds. “Both Arctic and red-throated loons flew

Blue Jay

daily, while slim, buoyant Arctic terns, with their bright red beaks, long slender tapering wings and scissor-like forked tails, perched lightly on bits of bare driftwood or drifted swallow-like overhead." About the sudden Arctic summer here is another example. "Scarlet Arctic rhododendron bloomed in the damper spots among the willows while waxy yellow marsh marigold and handsome clusters of Labrador tea flourished in lower areas with their roots in shallow water. Striking down-clad woolly lousewort extended its compact, bright red flower heads toward the sun, while its closer relative, the Arctic lousewort, was resplendent in shades of pink."

As an example of Cy Hampson's writing about mammals I chose this description of Eeyore, the old muskox dying on the tundra, unassailed by the wolves nearby. "Golden-gray fur covered the hump and middorsal region, the sides were darker brown, the face still darker and the lower legs a bright silver. The lustrous eyes were shades of blue, ringed prominent ridges under our fingertips. The eyes were partially closed except when we touched him. He no longer struggled. He appeared to be failing fast."

And now, a word or two about the arrangement and mechanics of the book. The diction is a pleasure to experience. I had not known of Cy Hampson's earlier graduate work in England, I had only known him as a competent zoologist and gentle naturalist of the great plains and the tundra. There are singularly few typographical errors and spelling mistakes that creep into electronic page preparation in spite of any author. I would find the chapter identification easier to refer to if chapter numbers had accompanied the chapter titles on the first page of each chapter. I believe that the exquisite colour photographs would have been even more useful if separated into plates bound into the pages near where they were treated but such is the price an author pays to the "mechanics of publication."

What a wonderful opportunity this book provides for those who rejoice in the wonders of the natural world. Those who read it will be well rewarded with more knowledge of our planet and its inhabitants.

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How do spiders view frost in their webs? As so much flotsam cluttering the lines? or are they too numb from the cold morning to notice? *Braun and Cavagnaro. 1971. Living Water. American West, Palo Alto, CA.*