

expect, the relative amounts of information on different groups of birds reflect the research projects of the authors. Bald Eagles are best studied from the water, and waterbirds are thoroughly documented. Only the raptors encountered during the kestrel studies are described in comparable detail. Shorebirds and, particularly, small songbirds, are mostly listed with only a line or two of information. This is particularly disappointing because there are some fascinating nuggets here that deserve further study: Bay-breasted Warblers, for example, have not been recorded in the last 17 years, and there is only one record of Golden-crowned Kinglet. The authors did carry out owl censuses and forest-bird transects in a commendable effort to lessen their dependence on observations made during their focused research projects, but one is left wondering whether some of the anomalies in the passerine records might still reflect the inevitable biases of the field work.

That said, the information on water birds and raptors is comprehensive and fascinating. Clearly the region is of exceptional interest in the contrast of aquatic habitat types between the two halves of Besnard Lake, and in the abundance of piscivorous species. The benefit to kestrels of the opening up of the forest by logging roads is well documented, as is the surprising abundance of Boreal Owls that Bortolotti discovered during his research. It is refreshing to read of a bird fauna dominated by long-term increases in abundance, or stable populations, rather than peppered with references to population declines! However there is a warning in the discussion of the increases in fish-eating birds, likely due to over-fishing of the larger predatory fish, allowing increases in abundance of the

smaller "forage" fish on which many of these birds feed. As fishermen become more aware of declines in their primary target species, they will likely blame the birds for it, as has happened so widely elsewhere on this continent. Naturalists will need to be on their guard for the inevitable demands for "control" of fish-eating birds by fishermen unwilling to accept responsibility for their own in-temperate behaviour.

This is a fascinating book which succeeds admirably in presenting solid information in a palatable and interesting style. The authors are particularly to be congratulated for retaining and communicating their underlying enthusiasm for natural history, which remains the essential foundation to the rigorous science for which the authors are already well known.

- Reviewed by *Tony Diamond*, Director, Atlantic Cooperative Wildlife Ecology Research Network, UNB, Fredericton, NB

BRITISH COLUMBIA — A NATURAL HISTORY

RICHARD CANNINGS and SYDNEY CANNINGS. 1996. Greystone Books, Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver. 320 pages, 7 1/2" x 10", \$45.00 cloth.

If Christmas money is burning a hole in your pocket, or if you have been wondering what to get your sister Mary for her birthday, here is the perfect answer. The book is about the natural history of B.C. but, as I leafed through this handsome volume, among the first of the many gorgeous colour pictures to catch my eye were two of familiar prairie species. The first is a larger-than-full-page shot of a Yellow-headed Blackbird perched among exploding cattail seed heads; the other is a stunning

double page photograph of a clump of Prickly Pear Cactus blossoms. The Cannings' latest book may be about Canada's west coast province, but it contains much to interest people of the Great Plains as well as anywhere else in the country. For those who, like myself, maintain a long-distance love affair with B.C., interspersed with more intimate visits, it is a genuine delight.

The Preface declares that the book "is intended to provide an introduction to the ecosystems of the province and to tempt readers to learn and explore more by offering a few intriguing, in-depth stories about life in those ecosystems." The authors fulfil their intention admirably well. Although I didn't need much tempting, the book led me through many new doors into fascinating rooms where I look forward to spending more time in study.

As you go through the book you will read about hot-blooded lizards, snuggling winter kinglets, long-nosed grasshoppers, illuminated bacteria, self-propelling plants, lungless salamanders, and algae that live inside sea anemones. You will also be intrigued by how mosquitoes find us, how mistletoes spit seeds, how sunspots affect snowshoe hares, how barnacles make love, and how water in some trees can reach a temperature of -40° before freezing.

The text is sprinkled with wonderfully descriptive imagery:

"Great geological forces have created the giant canvas we call B.C., but it is painted by the Pacific."

"A shoreline is ... a wall between two worlds. Along seacoasts, tides are like a swinging door in this wall,

bringing the sea onto the land and then extending the land into the sea."

"If you look closely you can see an American Dipper a grey tennis ball of a bird nervously doing knee bends on the polished rocks."

Seeing in the Preface that each chapter stands on its own, I read the chapter on the Grasslands first. While the grasslands of B.C. have their own unique character, there is a great deal in this chapter to which prairie people can relate. Then I read the one on The Spruce Kingdom. The latter has much of interest for those who love Canada's vast boreal forest. There are other chapters devoted to particular ecosystems: the coastal waters of the Pacific, the rain forests, mountaintops, montane forests and fresh water worlds. The first three chapters set the context, dealing with geological history and the influence of the ocean and the ice ages on B.C.'s geography and biology.

My only criticism of the book is that the most demanding material is in these initial chapters. I found my mind wandering from time-to-time as I read them. Although there is some logic to this organization of content, and while the Preface suggests starting wherever one wishes, I can't help feeling that the authors might have been wiser to choose some other strategy. Don't let this deter you from buying the book, however.

It is a beautiful volume. For the most part it reads well, gripping your attention. There are many fascinating things to learn from it. It contains 130 full-colour photographs — almost forty of them a page or double page in size — and twenty-five maps. Numerous line drawings of plant and animal species appear as sidebars and make the book useful

as a field guide. Interesting quotations are inserted in the text at appropriate points. There is a bibliography and a list of environmental organizations, as well as an index. And if you are concerned about what human beings are doing to the natural world, you will appreciate the Epilogue with its strong appeal for the protection of ecosystems and its call for environmental action.

British Columbia — A Natural History is a volume I am happy to have on my shelf. I suspect that whoever receives it as a gift, whether it is your sister Mary or yourself, will feel the same.

- Reviewed by *Garth Nelson*, 529 Dalhousie Crescent, Saskatoon, SK. S7H 3S5

RECENT OBSERVATIONS

A Varied Thrush was reported from Edam, northwest of the Battlefords on 1 December and one was seen at Weyburn (25 November). Another was seen earlier at Kindersley (1 October). A Hawk Owl was reported from Edam on 30 November, while another seen in the Qu'Appelle Valley (23 November) was possibly the same one observed earlier, closer to Regina (19 November). Another interesting owl, a Boreal, was seen at Regina Beach (20 November). A Black-backed Woodpecker was observed in Saskatoon (19 November) and a late lingering Spotted Towhee was there on 16 November. A weak Common Eider, picked up near Riceton, subsequently died (18 November). Another Common Eider was seen on Last Mountain Lake (16 November). Three Common and two King Eiders were seen at Regina Beach (9 November), but this was reduced to one Common and two King for the 10 and 11 November. On 12 November a Common Eider was viewed on Blackstrap Reservoir. A dark phase Gyrfalcon, 3 White Pelicans, all three mergansers and 14 Bald Eagles

were at Gardiner Dam on 12 November. A Gyrfalcon was also seen earlier at Regina Beach (2 November). Short-eared Owls were seen to the north, south and in the middle of Saskatoon during November. Snowy Owls were reported from several locations in the province. A SNS trip to Cypress Hills netted a Mountain Chickadee, a Three-toed Woodpecker, many eagles and some large groups of Pronghorn. A Pomarine Jaeger was identified at Regina Beach (11 November) and may have been the unidentified jaeger seen earlier at the same location (7 November). An Oldsquaw and the first Northern Shrike of the season were seen at Blackstrap on 5 November. A Pacific Loon turned up on Last Mountain Lake (28 October) and a surprisingly early Yellow-billed Loon was reported from Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park (22 September). Snowy Owls were initially reported from several locations in the province, but by the end of November were scarce. The intense cold and higher-than-normal snowfall may have driven them farther south.

