

brown creepers forage for insects and larvae in the rough bark of elm trees. Several species of butterflies also depend on the elms for feeding during their caterpillar stage. The colourful Baltimore Orioles are among the birds that look to elms for nesting sites. The loss of our elm trees would mean the loss of a critical habitat, impacting on urban wild-

life, such as birds and butterflies. The effect on the wildlife population would be greatest in a city like Regina where the urban forest is made up of at least 50% elms.

- ELENA SCHACHERL, Administrator, Dutch Elm Disease Management Program, 112 Research Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7K 2H6

NATURE LIBRARY

BIRD SONG. IDENTIFICATION MADE EASY

ERNIE JARDINE. 1996. Natural Heritage/
Natural History Inc., Toronto. \$14.95 paper.

As a birder who uses ears as much as eyes, I'm always looking for materials to sharpen my skills. I suspect, unfortunately, that this book sounds more useful than it may be. But since, in winter, many of the birds on Jardine's basic songster list are a continent away from Canada, testing his approach now cannot do it justice. It deserves to be field-tested.

Jardine's premise is laudable. He decided it must be possible to organize common songs in such a way that people new to birdwatching could identify species by song, without having to see them first. For naming warblers haunting the tops of tall trees, this method could be superb.

Jardine first developed a list of 25-30 of the most common eastern birds (later increasing this to 100). He divided their songs, those most commonly heard and, in some cases, alternatives as well, into four main categories:

very short (single-, two- and three-note); repeated notes (single, twos, threes); short songs with varying notes (several varying or with distinct repetition); long songs with varying notes (many varying or as short, variable phrases). A "bird-hearer" begins by asking "Is this a very short song or a series of repeated notes?" If neither, then it is either a short song with varying notes or a long song with varying notes. This "keying" process is designed to get aspiring bird "detectives" into the right section. I've talked with birdwatchers who found enough fun in this "game" that they didn't let a few mistakes worry them.

For almost every species, Jardine gives visual representation of song or songs, using special symbols, as well as verbal description with bold and italic highlighting of important elements. He cross references in a section on habitat types. "Going for a Walk" focuses on what to expect along a specified route, where to look and what to listen for. A little livelier style would have made this chapter stand out more and be more fun to use.

He finishes by describing the songs of another 25 less common eastern species, and gives an overview of all 125 songs, organized according to habitat. This section and the earlier one based on habitat are quite useful organizing tools for the species information and help sort out some of the confusion created where similar words describe different songs.

Jardine's focus on eastern birds reduces the book's usefulness for Saskatchewan. And, even there, his 100 species obviously miss a good many that will be singing out for identification. I, for one, find his song categories rather confusing — the distinctions between two-note songs and two notes repeated, between a short song containing a distinct repeated note and two or three notes repeated, etc. Perhaps after more experience with the system, I might better sense its usefulness. Its strong point, I think, is its emphasis on categorizing and comparing and analyzing — very useful for learning many things, including bird songs. Its greatest value may turn out to be for experienced birders helping others to learn bird songs. It would be even more useful if given a more western flavour.

The text could use tighter editing; repetition has its purpose, but there seems more than enough here. And, for some reason, though no pages are missing, my copy has five duplicate pages.

I look forward to warmer days and a group of birders to try out the system.

- Reviewed by *Mary Gilliland*, 902 University Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0K1

EAGLES

DAVID JONES. 1996. Whitecap Books, Vancouver/Toronto. 110 pp., \$24.95 cloth.

This is the quintessential coffee table book. Its large, square format (28 x 28 cm) accommodates some 60 full colour photographs plus additional sketches and paintings distributed, with accompanying descriptive captions, across its 110 pages. These share space with a conversational but informative text surrounded by ample white margins, which enhance the visual impact.

Author David Jones, a Vancouver-based zoologist-turned-nature writer, has selected from the work of twelve accomplished photographers to illustrate the life history of eagles. Nine photographs are by Wayne Lynch, a Saskatchewan photographer whose work is familiar to many of us through his annual engagement calendars and other publications.

The "Eagles" of the title refers to North American eagles, and the book makes only passing reference to species other than the Bald Eagle and the Golden Eagle.

The book is a visual celebration of eagles. It is not a textbook or a field guide. The strength of the book lies in the details and clarity of the photographs and the mood they convey.

The selection of images is well balanced between the various activities of an eagle (although biased towards Bald Eagles). I would like to have seen more pictures of soaring eagles, well lit, and with the field marks clearly showing. After all, except for perched birds, this is how most of us see eagles, and soaring is what eagles do best.

The illustrations and text are divided into four sections. An introduction involves the reader in the emotional impact of the first encounter with an eagle by the writer as a young boy; this leads into a short essay on the place of the eagle in our lives, its origin, distribution and survival in a world seemingly intent on destroying its habitat.

Next, a section on the eagle as hunter begins the account of its life cycle. In the text we learn briefly about the diet, range, and hunting strategy of this magnificent bird, but the action shots of the fierce determination of the eagle are what catch the eye and quicken our interest.

Courting, nesting, and raising the young are the substance of the third section. Again the photographs do not disappoint. From the precarious cliff-side nest, to the care and feeding of the young, to the awkward comical appearance of a downy eaglet, the photographs capture our attention and respect.

The final section provides some insight in to problems faced by the fledgling as it sets out to establish its place in the uncertain and unforgiving natural world.

The strength of this book lies in the images. It is clearly not a detailed natural history of Bald and Golden Eagles, and the reader should not expect it to be. However, the text and captions to the photographs provide a useful outline, and tie the images together in a memorable way.

Plumage differences between the species and between adult and immature birds are briefly noted, but no attempt is made to illustrate the differences systematically. For the

birder who wants to learn how to distinguish an immature Bald Eagle from a Golden Eagle this may be considered a serious shortcoming, but, to be fair, such detailed treatment is beyond the scope of this book. In one respect this can even be regarded as a stimulating challenge. More than one photograph shows an eagle that is not identified; determining the species requires a close examination of the details — but the clues are there in the text and elsewhere.

The eagle is a symbol for us because of its size, strength, and regal bearing — and at close proximity these are daunting features. But set the eagle at a distance in its environment, as some of the photographs do, and we get a feeling for how these features may have been forged by the grandeur of nature itself. These are striking images: one can almost feel the rugged strength of the mountains and the bite of the sea wind on the face.

The exquisite close-ups of the heads of eagles are even more compelling — the intricate details of feather and eye are marvellous to contemplate.

At first reading, to borrow from the jargon of the computer age, “what you see is what you get” might sum up the value of the book. But I find that the images evoke a depth of feeling and awareness that increases with each subsequent perusal. This is a book to savour at leisure, or simply to dip into from time to time for spiritual refreshment.

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