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BIRDS OF EAST-CENTRAL SASKATCHEWAN: KELVINGTON TO KELSEY TRAIL

DONALD F. HOOPER. 1992. Publication No. 1 in the Manley Callin Series and No. 18 in the regular series of special publications by the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Regina, Saskatchewan. 160 pp., 36 photographs, 2 maps. \$8.95.

One may not be able to judge a book by its cover, nevertheless, an impressive cover can enhance both the appearance and content of a book. This is certainly the case with Hooper's publication, *Birds of East-Central Saskatchewan*. Its cover features a colour photograph of three brightly plumaged adult male Pine Grosbeaks foraging within a bare ground space that is surrounded by snow. The visual impact of the birds combined with the matching and contrasting colours within the photograph, the margins and the lettering all contribute to the appeal of this attractive cover.

The cover is not the only part of this book that benefits from Hooper's photographic prowess. An additional 36 black and white photographs are included within this publication. One image celebrates a special moment as the author holds a flightless Trumpeter Swan prior to the placement of a colour-coded collar. This collar assisted in locating the wintering area or origin of the Greenwater Provincial Park birds within South Dakota. Hooper has been instrumental in researching and documenting the changing status of this species as it apparently reoccupies its historical breeding range within this region. My favourite photographs are those which provide visual reference for both the habitat zones and the special conservation project sections located within this area. Some

photographs provide important documentation of breeding. Several present Hooper with an opportunity to share his unique sense of humour by combining certain images with clever captions.

More evidence of Hooper's humour is displayed within his poem entitled "The Elusive Chicklet." This poem captures the challenge of bird identification within the context of weather, active behaviour, and various lighting conditions. In the case of the Christmas Bird Count, the poem also highlights the additional constraint of time.

Hooper's two maps, located within "The Area" section, significantly contribute to the value of this publication. One map outlines many important regional geographical features, including roads, towns, drainage patterns, lakes and altitudinal readings. A matching key enables the reader to locate these features through alphabetical and numerical cross-references. Another map displays the boundaries of this area's habitat zones upon its surface. These zones are cross-referenced with brief paragraphs that identify indicator tree and plant species, describe typical sites, and discuss historical events that have modified several habitats. An adjacent section discusses several regional conservation projects by outlining their size, specific locations, and special geographical and ornithological characteristics. This section also describes historical events surrounding the origins of these projects.

Another interesting subsection chronicles the personal histories of the Hooper twin brothers (Donald and Ronald) and their many contributions to the study of natural history within the province. Next, Hooper acknowledges a large number of people who have shared their observations and records to create the data base for this publication. It is evident that these records cover the span of many years. This

impressive list of contributors includes biologists, naturalists, trappers, public officials, farmers and homemakers. A special subsection recognizes several persons for their major contributions, through the broad scope of their research and records.

A useful section contains a chart which assigns a status to those birds which are "confirmed," "probable," "suspected," or "possible" breeders within the region. This sectional chart creates a baseline that challenges subsequent observers to clarify or change these designations through additional records.

Another brief section summarizes information collected from 1978-91 during the Somme Christmas Bird Counts. Again, this data is presented within a chart, enabling the reader to grasp trends in both the patterns of occurrences and numbers of birds found during these events. This section also contains a list of all Christmas count locations within this region.

The major section of this publication contains the "Species Accounts" which documents the status of the 286 species that have been recorded within this region. Each species is classified using the common and scientific names as assigned by the *American Ornithological Union (AOU) Checklist*, including various updates. Breeding birds are assigned a status as permanent or summer residents. Accounts of non-breeding birds include the seasonal reference of summer, spring/fall, or winter visitors. Transient status is given to passage birds which migrate through the area in spring, fall or both seasons. Each species account features one or more brief paragraphs summarizing all records and other pertinent information. Breeding data is included if proven or suspected. Transient and breeding species accounts include dates of early arrivals, spring departures and early and/or late departures. These concise yet comprehensive accounts are an excellent

source of information.

Species abundance codes are based upon the probability of observation while visiting the correct habitat during the appropriate season or seasons. These codes include: abundant, common, uncommon, rare, and irregular (very rare, not present every year). This last designation - irregular - is used to describe the status of a substantial number of species. In some cases, this status is assigned to species which are very much out of range. Birds such as Rufous Hummingbird or Lewis Woodpecker are probably better designated as "vagrants". Others, such as Barred Owl, Chimney Swift, or Surf Scooter are more likely candidates for a "regular" status as they occur on passage or as residents in similar habitats nearby.

I understand the author's dilemma. If there are only one or two records for a species, it is difficult to assign a status without speculating as I have. Hooper has chosen to refrain from speculation and has implicitly issued a challenge for subsequent observers to clarify each status through new data records.

The final sections of this publication include: a brief section entitled "Additional Species Found Within 70 Kilometres of This Area," a detailed "Bibliography of References," a short "Botanical Index," and "Page References for All Species." An excellent "Seasonal Checklist" provides a quick summary of seasonal abundances that supplements the "Species Accounts." All of these features contribute to the value of this publication as a comprehensive regional reference.

In summary, Donald Hooper's *Birds of East-Central Saskatchewan: Kelvington to Kelsey Trail* greatly contributes to both our knowledge and appreciation of this region's rich, diverse avifauna and natural history.

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