

BIRDS OF THE ROSETOWN-BIGGAR DISTRICT

ROBERT D. WAPPLE and WAYNE E. RENAUD. 2008. Manley Callin Series No. 7 and Nature Saskatchewan Special Publications No. 27. Nature Saskatchewan, Regina, SK. 384 pages. Soft Cover. 21.5 cm by 14 cm. 1 map, 4 figures, 31 black and white photographs. \$24.95 CDN. ISBN: 978-0-921104-23-0.

This book is the last of the regional bird books published by Nature Saskatchewan before the massive two-volume *Birds of Saskatchewan* book set is completed. It is also an update of the original edition of the *Birds of Rosetown-Biggarr District* published in 1975.³ This edition has more than three times the number of pages than the first edition. Like the previous regional bird books, it is not a bird identification guide. Its purpose is to provide local information about birds and their habitats, bird occurrence and abundance, spring and fall arrival and departure dates, and any breeding and wintering records.

The authors successfully replicated the high standards set by the *Birds of the Elbow* and the subsequent regional bird books.⁴ It is more plain than the 8 × 11 *Birds of the Saskatoon Area*, with only a limited number of excellent black and white photographs by George Tosh, a few figures, and no bird drawings.²

The book begins with a dedication to William Jasper and Wayne Harris, who did extensive ornithological work in the study area. The first section of the book gives a very useful overview of the study area and how it differs from the original study area. A list of places and geographical features discussed in the book along with their map

coordinates is given here. The map of the study area is found on the inside back cover. Unfortunately, the greyscale map is difficult to read. A more readable colour insert of the study area map is now included with the book.

A very useful and interesting summary of the archaeology and cultural history of the study area is included in the book. The discussion of the study area's climate, geography, hydrology, and the main bird habitats is detailed but succinct and well written. Although I have visited parts of the study area, reading the study area background was very helpful. This section is sprinkled with a number of small black and white photographs.

Following the section of the study area background is a list of abbreviations used in the species accounts. The list of abbreviations is followed by the introduction to the species accounts. This section uses the same terms and definitions used in the *Birds of Elbow* and the subsequent regional bird books.^{1, 2, 4} These terms cover bird breeding and migration status, abundance, seasonal occurrence, median spring arrival and departure dates, and status designated by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Reviewing these definitions before using the species

accounts for the first time is highly recommended. This section also has a brief summary on Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Bird Counts, Owl Surveys, and banding conducted in the study area. Species-specific banding information is included when available in the individual species accounts.

Over 80% of the book is dedicated to the 282 species accounts. These species accounts vary in size and format based on the amount of information available and the status of the species. There are introductory sections to waterfowl, shorebirds, and warblers. These sections were useful overviews of the species groupings. Other bird groupings such as raptors and sparrows should have had introductory sections as well.

The species accounts are clearly written and the information is error-free. These accounts briefly discuss any interesting behaviour observed by local bird watchers, first records of the species in the study area, and locations and habitats used by the species. Any breeding, wintering, and banding records, occurrence records, and extreme and median arrival and departure dates are also included. These accounts are similar in style to those found in *Birds of the Elbow* and *Birds of the Saskatoon Area*.^{2,4} I prefer full sentences over the heavy reliance on abbreviations and short sentences used in species accounts as found in the *Birds of Yorkton-Duck Mountain*.¹ A few photos are included throughout the species accounts, but more photos

or bird drawings would have made this book more attractive.

Two appendices and an extensive and useful bibliography of over 150 references are provided. The first appendix is a list of non-avian species mentioned in the book, and the second appendix is a list of bird kills at SaskTel communication towers near Stranraer in August 1989. An Index or a detailed Table of Contents would have been useful in finding information more quickly and more easily.

This book clearly exceeds its goal in providing a useful and concise updated written record of the birds of the Rosetown-Biggar District. I highly recommend this book anyone interested in the Rosetown-Biggar District and its birds.

1. HOUSTON, C.S. and W. ANAKA. 2003. Birds of Yorkton and Duck Mountain. Manley Callin Series No. 6 and Nature Saskatchewan Special Publication No. 24. Nature Saskatchewan, Regina, SK.
2. LEIGHTON, A., J. HAY, C.S. HOUSTON and S. SHADICK. 2002. Birds of the Saskatoon Area. Manley Callin Series No. 5 and Nature Saskatchewan Special Publication No. 23. Nature Saskatchewan, Regina, SK.
3. RENAUD, W.E. and D.H. RENAUD. 1975. Birds of the Rosetown-Biggar District. Nature Saskatchewan Special Publication No. 9. Nature Saskatchewan, Regina, SK.
4. ROY, J.F. 1996. Birds of the Elbow. Manley Callin Series No. 3 and Nature Saskatchewan Special Publication No. 21. Nature Saskatchewan, Regina, SK.

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GRASS, SKY, SONG: PROMISE AND PERIL IN THE WORLD OF GRASSLAND BIRDS

TREVOR HERRIOT. 2009. Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., Toronto. ON. Hardcover. 288 pages. 14.6 x 21.2 x 1.5 cm. 17 black and white drawings. ISBN - 10: 1554680387. \$32.95 CDN



Western Meadowlark singing in Grasslands National Park, SK.

Vicky Kjoss & Chris Somers

Grass, Sky, Song is a book that eloquently reveals the spirit of the grassland world, and the uniqueness of its birds. The author, Trevor Herriot, draws on over 20 years of experience as an observer of nature to draw the reader to both the beauty of grassland landscapes and wildlife, and threats to their existence.

The author speaks clearly from the heart, which greatly enhances the book. He openly shares his passion, fears, and hopes for the prairie and its

birds. Personal stories and observations make the book riveting. Particular highlights include his personal 'discovery' of grassland birds and the 2005 retracing (with Stuart Houston) of John Macoun's expedition across southern Saskatchewan in the late 1800s. At times, Herriot makes you laugh with a funny anecdote and other times makes you very sad with facts and observations about grassland bird decline and the alarming increased incidence of cancer in prairie people,

including his own family. I was often relating what I read to my own personal experiences and observations of the prairie landscape. His excellent, easy to read and poetic prose does truly make the prairie, birds and wildlife, the people, and the many threats to them literally come alive.

Although not a science book *per se*, Herriot clearly distills complex scientific issues with eloquent prose and strategic use of statistics, making the issues discussed readily understandable and useful for both the layperson and the expert. The bird conservation issues discussed in the book are similar to those found in Brigit Stuchbury's highly regarded book the *Silence of the Songbirds*.¹ Through 18 chapters, Herriot discusses factors affecting bird conservation, such as socio-economics, human population growth, habitat loss, climate change, and pesticides, as well as bird population monitoring and trends. His research for *Grass, Sky, Song* is impeccable, and his interviews with prominent prairie ornithologists such as Stuart Houston and Steve Davis further strengthen the book. At the end of the book, there is a useful notes and references section.

Between each chapter is a two- to three-page profile of grassland bird species at risk of extinction. These profiles briefly and accurately describe each species' status and threats to its existence and how its natural history attributes interact with the current and evolving prairie landscape. For each species profile, there is a beautiful drawing of the species by the author. Seventeen grassland species are specifically profiled in this book, including Sharp-tailed Grouse, Western Meadowlark, Burrowing Owl,

Sprague's Pipit and Swainson's Hawk. These species profiles complement and strengthen the main chapters of the book.

Herriot is correct in saying that loss of grassland birds and their habitats diminishes the value of prairie and makes us poorer. A good question is 'if grassland birds disappear, is it still a truly functional prairie?' We face the real prospect of a 'silent spring' as described by Rachel Carson on the prairie in the future.²

Although from different perspectives (self-taught naturalist versus professional biologist), and considering different birds and habitats, Herriot and Stuchbury have come to the same conclusion that we need hope, and practical ways to help advance bird conservation and strengthen the bonds between nature and culture. Like Stuchbury, Herriot successfully ends the book with practical ways for people to help birds and their habitats. These include smart consumer choices that can sustain the prairie, education of others about the prairie and its birds, effective conservation efforts that make a positive difference, and effective lobbying efforts to ensure positive outcomes from government decision-makers.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in prairie bird conservation and ecology.

1. STUCHBURY, B. 2007. *Silence of the Songbirds*. Harper Perennial, Toronto, ON.

2. CARSON, R. 1962. *Silent Spring*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, MA, USA.

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