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BIRDS OF THE SASKATOON AREA

Edited by ANNA L. LEIGHTON, JIM HAY, C. STUART HOUSTON, J. FRANK ROY, and STAN SHADICK. 2002. No. 5, Manley Callin Series, Special Publication No. 23, Saskatchewan Natural History Society (Nature Saskatchewan). 345 pp. 29 colour photos, 39 b/w sketches. 14 maps. \$39.00.

I never cease to be impressed by the accomplishments of Saskatchewan naturalists, and this latest production is no exception. Published by Nature Saskatchewan with support from the Saskatoon Nature Society, this substantial volume – five years in the making – is yet another exemplary and scholarly contribution to knowledge of bird distribution, occurrence and behavior in Saskatchewan. Thus, the legacy initiated in Yorkton by Isabel Priestly [with encouragement from Winnipeg's A.G. Lawrence, I might add!] is continued.

Five editors sounds like a committee, and we all know how difficult it can be to get anything done by a committee. Still, the success of this group may be judged by the clarity, detail and obvious enjoyment of birding that typifies this entire publication. The editors must have worked like beavers to deliver a production of this level. This competent team has dealt favorably with contributions, that is, notes, records and observations, from over a hundred Saskatoon area birders along with an incredible “60,000 field notes, collected between 1965 and 1988” – in large measure, it should be added, driven by the determination and persuasion of the late Bernie Gollop. What an accomplishment!

It is the focus upon dependable records of birds from a select and restricted area of the province that typifies publications in this series, beginning with Houston and Street's 1959 *Carlton to Cumberland* (Spec. Publ. No. 2) and right up to Roy's 1996

Birds of the Elbow (Spec. Publ. No. 21). Thus, Manley Callin's inspired legacy – himself the author of Special Publication No. 13, *Birds of the Qu'Appelle, 1857-1979* – continues to bear fruit, as it should.

Birds of the Saskatoon Area is in a large format (ca. 9" x 11") and spiral-bound. It contains a selection of detailed maps of the whole region and of specific portions. Maps on the inside of the end-covers are especially instructive. These end-covers, by the way, larger than the pages by several inches, are designed to fold in, presumably to protect the pages. The back cover has a flap that folds over the front edge, an unusual feature that I found somewhat cumbersome. The large format suits the color photos, most taken by George Tosh, and all either half-page or full page (three). These glossy summer and fall landscape photos are glorious proof that the Saskatoon area is anything but flat, barren prairie. This is a stunning array that will startle and impress readers from outside this region.

On top of all the other good features of this book, there appears a nice literary touch, a short but pertinent foreword by Farley Mowat who, it turns out, birded in the Saskatoon area as a teen-ager. This choice item is followed by an appropriate extract from *Born Naked*, describing Mowat's recollections of camping out in May 1937 beside a bird-rich slough.

This is far more than a record of bird distribution and occurrence, the kind of information so useful to, say, a

zoogeographer. There are good tips on bird identification, notes on habitat selection and requirements, breeding behavior and nesting chronology, food habits and species' interactions. There is detailed information on numbers of birds banded in the Saskatoon area (73, 610 of 171 species!) and a summary of the recovery results. In short, this book is a kind of encyclopedia of birds, with details on nest box requirements, results of breeding bird surveys, research projects, an extensive bibliography, an index to both English and French names of bird species, a list of common and scientific names of plants of the area, and a glossary. Birders new to the area will appreciate the wonderfully detailed directions ("watch for potholes") for visiting the various birding hotspots within the Saskatoon area.

The handsome cover of this new book is adorned with a color photo by Gerard W. Beyersbergen of one of my favorite birds, a nearly life-size male Yellow-headed Blackbird against a blue sky. This lively cover illustration is followed inside by sketches of 39 birds by six Saskatoon Nature Society members, each of whom has contributed from 2 to 16 artworks. These drawings vary considerably in execution, from realistic to impressionistic, from forceful characterizations to the delightfully serene, from moody (the raven) to rather grim (the magpie). The latter, a malevolent-looking individual, to my eye, may reflect ranchers' and some birders' prevailing view of this species as a marauder – such bias! Still, one can only applaud the local committee for supporting this freedom of expression.

Local birders not only contributed their records, but the 340 species accounts were, in fact, researched and written by some 77 different persons. Thus, there is a degree of variation in the style and presentation of accounts. Still, the editorial committee clearly had some role in this, for, as far as I could tell after browsing through the book for more than a week, the accounts are all

soundly based and to the point. Well, all right, some accounts are more serious than others. Best of all, I think, is that this publication proves that it is possible to contribute to science, to the knowledge of bird distribution and occurrence, without diminishing our appreciation of the beauty and wonder of birds.

In conclusion, I like this book – which is appropriately dedicated to Bernie Gollop – and I think that all who acquire it will also like it. Most noteworthy, may I add, is the statement in the preface that "this book is really just another step toward understanding the birds of the Saskatoon area."

- Reviewed by Robert W. Nero,
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ENCOUNTER

Dusk. April night descending.
A cold mist graying things.
Distant bushes blurred, obscured.
Last year's grasses sodden at my feet.
Somewhere, a faint hallooing.
A wild crying, maybe. Voices.
Silence again.
I, huddled, still, peering into dimness.
Nearer clamour then.
A muted *honka-honk*.
A lone goose in cleaving flight
Emerges darkly from the mist
(Had it heard my far-off steps
And come to reconnoitre?),
Swings wide in parabolic arc before me –
Just one acknowledging brief *honk* –
And surges swiftly back
Through veils of space and mystery
To some safe rendezvous
With others of its kind.

- Victor C. Friesen