

FINDING BIRDS IN SOUTHERN MANITOBA

BRAD CAREY et al. 2006. Manitoba Naturalists Society and Brandon Naturalists Society. 210 pages. Soft Cover. 14 cm by 21.5 cm. 50 colour photographs, 33 maps. ISBN 0-9697280-3-4 (MNS); 0-9782374-0-4 (BNS). Cost: \$23.55 (includes handling and postage within Canada) from Manitoba Naturalists Society, 401-63 Albert St., Winnipeg, MB R3B 1G4 and Brandon Naturalists Society, 605 41st St., Brandon, MB R7B 4E1.

Birders from all over North America and from abroad often choose Manitoba as the place where they are likely to encounter the broadest range of North American birds in a short period of time. Confirmation of the wisdom of their choice is found in the "Big Day" counts for the most species seen in a single midnight-to-midnight period. Southern Manitoba holds the North American records for June and July, and Canadian records for all months from May through September! The 200-species record for Manitoba (and Canada) was first broken in May 1987 by a team of four birders who saw 205 species in 24 hours. On 2 June 2006, 212 species were recorded in a one-day jaunt from southeast to southwest, a North American record.

A group of well-known Manitoba birders has just published one of the best bird-finding guides available anywhere. Their names deserve mention in a review: Brad Carey, Ward Christianson, Andy Courcelles, Calvin W. Cuthbert, Larry de March, Ken D. De Smet, George E. Holland, Jean I. Horton, Rudolf F. Koes, Robert J. Parsons, Amelia Reid, Peter Taylor, Liis Veelma, Marlene Waldron, Adam Walley, Gene Walz, Margaret Yorke. Although the title rightfully suggests a focus on "southern Manitoba," key sites

in central Manitoba as far north as The Pas are also included. The book consolidates and updates two previous works: *Birder's Guide to Southwestern Manitoba* (1990) and *Birder's Guide to Southeastern Manitoba* (1980, 1988).

Sturdy, ring-bound, with field guide dimensions (unless you are thinking of Sibley), this 210-page book is readily portable. As a help to planning your Manitoba visit and the bird species you'd like to see, the guide includes both species and location indices and a list of birding organizations and local contacts. The well-developed Table of Contents (pp. iii-vii) provides a useful summary of the content which follows. A short introduction and a summary of recent changes in bird numbers and distribution are followed by a few pages of practical advice for the traveler. They honestly admit that mosquitoes, wood ticks and deer ticks can be a problem in much of the area and they advise sensible precautions, particularly in years when West Nile virus or Lyme disease have been reported.

The guide is subdivided into three main geographic areas: Southeastern Manitoba (including Winnipeg, the south end of Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba, Whiteshell Park, and the extensive area south and east of

Winnipeg to the American and Ontario borders); Southwestern Manitoba (including Brandon, Oak Lake, Spruce Woods Park, Turtle Mountain Park, the extreme southwest prairie region, and Riding Mountain National Park); and Central Manitoba (including Hecla-Grindstone Park, Dauphin, Duck Mountain Park, the Porcupine Forest, and the highways to the The Pas and Thompson).

Most of the 80 or more site descriptions include a brief introduction to the area, specific directions on how to reach it, a map, and a listing of key bird species likely to be seen, with an emphasis on the specialties. Numerous hiking trails are described, and in some instances, availability of campgrounds and other accommodation is indicated. Mention is always made of roads which become slippery or impassable when wet.

The guide concludes with chapters on Man-made Habitats; Hawk Watch Sites; Specialties of the Region; a carefully developed Species List (30 pages) suggesting habitats in which a bird is most likely to be found, accompanied by bar graphs indicating normal seasonal abundance; and three further lists: Occasional Species (having occurred more than 5 times in region since 1980), Accidental Species (1 to 5 times in region since 1980), and Hypothetical Species (reported since 1980 but sighting not confirmed by Manitoba Ornithological Records Committee). A small list of pertinent Manitoba references is appended, as well as the Birding Code of Ethics,

developed by the American Birding Association.

This guide convinces me that Manitoba should be high on any birder's list of places to visit. The book is attractive, well written, compact, inexpensive and eminently practical. Perhaps surprising in a guide of this sort are the numerous colored habitat photos –a welcome addition. What is needed, however, is a large, fully detailed map of Manitoba to supplement the small maps in the text. Maps and accommodation guides can be ordered from Travel Manitoba at their web site, by mail from 155 Carlton St., Winnipeg, R3C 3H8 or by phone at 1-800-665-0040.

I can hardly wait to put this guide to practical use. Residents of Saskatchewan, particularly those within easy driving distance of the Manitoba border, will want to explore nearby sites like the Porcupine Provincial Forest, Duck Mountain, Riding Mountain National Park, Oak Lake, Spruce Woods Provincial Park, and Turtle Mountain Provincial Park. Wouldn't it be fun, though, to follow the Assiniboine after it leaves Saskatchewan to meander all the way to Winnipeg? And who among us would not be thrilled to hear or see American Woodcock, Eastern Screech Owl, Whip-poor-will, Chimney Swift, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Northern Parula, or Scarlet Tanager — all of them Manitoba specialties?

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“A breeding burrowing owl, threatened in its underground nest, gives a harsh, buzzing sound that closely matches that of an angry prairie rattlesnake.”

Scott Weidensaul, *The Birder's Miscellany*, p.41.

MYSTERY PHOTO

MARCH 2007 MYSTERY PHOTO

The bird on this slough near Last Mountain Regional Park in SK on 1 September 2005 is a *what?* (See photo on the bottom of the inside back cover.)

ANSWER TO THE DECEMBER 2006 MYSTERY PHOTO



Figure 1. Touch-me-not capsules and seeds

Patrick Leighton

The mystery object, shown in the middle of Figure 1, is the seed capsule of a plant called Touch-me-not, *Impatiens capiensis*. The capsule disperses seeds by popping open explosively when touched. The mystery object is a popped capsule. A capsule ready to pop can be seen on the right of Figure 1, and there are two seeds lying on the log to the left. Figure 2 shows Touch-me-not flowers and pods hanging from a plant growing along a lakeshore, a typical habitat for both native species of Touch-me-not that grow in the prairie provinces.

If you accidentally trigger a pod explosion, it can be quite startling. The pod makes a slight noise, throws back the 5 valves that make up the capsule wall at lightning speed, and sends the seeds flying. One feels movement and is apt to jump back. These photographs were taken at Besnard Lake, SK on 28 August 2006. If you are near a boreal forest lake or stream in late summer and encounter some pods, touch them gently to see if they are ripe enough to explode.



Figure 2. Touch-me-not flowers and seed pods

Anna Leighton