

BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA

FRANÇOIS VUILLEUMIER (EDITOR-IN-CHIEF). 2009. Dorling Kindersley, New York, New York. Hardcover: ISBN: 978-1-55363-103-3. 744 pages, 23.5 × 15.9 cm, \$55.00 CDN.

Birds of North America incorporates aspects of bird identification, life history features, and behaviour in a comprehensive and attractive reference volume. In contrast, most other bird guides either focus on identification or behaviour, but not both. *Birds of North America* contains full-page accounts for 654 bird species common to the continent, quarter-page entries for 68 rare species, and very brief descriptions of about 155 vagrant species. This book covers the continental USA and Canada, as well as adjacent coastal waters.

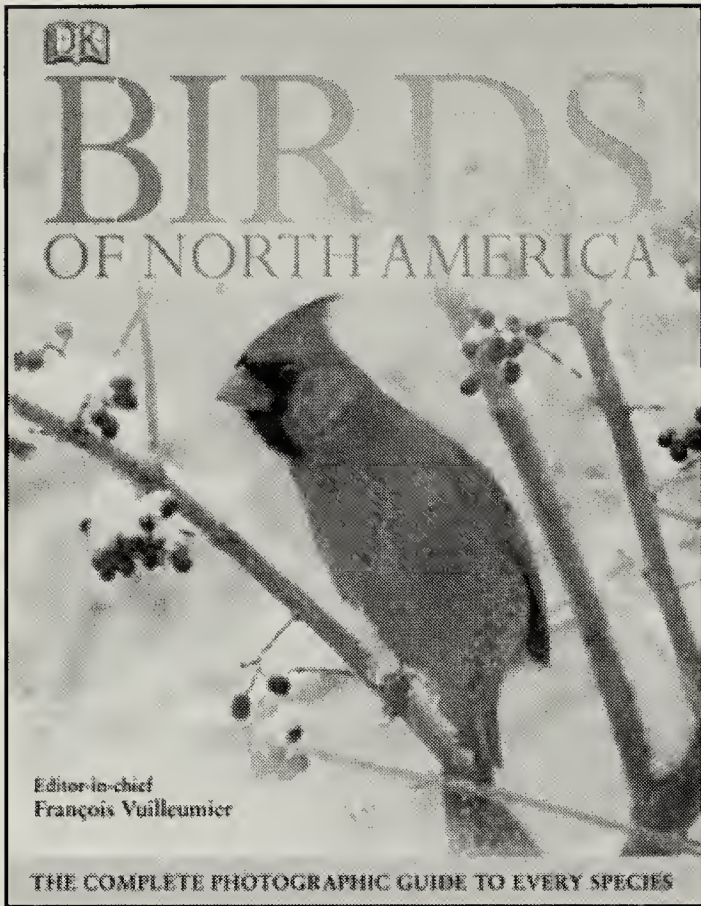
Inside the book, the species entries are ordered by conventional classification. Before your first use of the book, I recommend reading the section entitled 'How This Book Works' in the Introduction. It expertly explains each portion of the species accounts in all sections of the book. Each bird family section in the species guide begins with a useful and colourful page introducing typical species in the family and their habitats.

The accounts for common North American bird species are attractively arranged and full of useful and interesting natural history information. I particularly like the large primary and smaller secondary photos and bird-in-flight illustrations, each with helpful key identifying features clearly marked. These photos illustrate species in different views and plumage variations, including subspecies, sex, adult/juvenile, and seasonal. All photos, illustrations, and

range maps are clear and sharp. The natural history characteristics of each species are neatly summarized in the text or in the bottom panel of the page. You can quickly learn the voice, nesting habits, feeding habits, range, flight patterns, occurrence, social system, wingspan, size, lifespan, mass, and conservation status for each species. These accounts also contain an additional photo that reveals typical habitat or behaviour. The natural history information presented here is accurate and up-to-date. Each species account has a very useful insert box containing one to three similar species, highlighting their differences. These boxes also state on what page in the book you can quickly find accounts of similar species.

The rare species accounts contain one excellent photo each with diagnostic features pointed out, common and scientific species and family names, a brief description of the species, and information about occurrence in North America, voice, and size. Vagrant species entries simply list common and scientific species names, bird family common and scientific names, and brief descriptions of occurrence in North America and where they come from.

The Introduction also includes two-page summaries of the following topics: avian evolution, anatomy and flight, bird migration, courtship and mating, nest and eggs, and bird identification. These summaries are strongly supported by



relevant and attractive colour photos and illustrations. The bird identification article was particularly insightful about the key identification features. An article on North American bird habitats would perhaps have been useful here, but was not included in this volume.

The Table of Contents is very reader friendly, with the species guide portion divided by the common name of bird families. The book concludes with an excellent three-page glossary of avian terms, a very useful detailed index, and photo credit acknowledgements. Unfortunately, no bibliography or further reading section was included in the volume, which is unfortunate for those

readers who may want to learn more about the topics discussed.

A major reference guide that may be considered similar is the *Sibley Guide to Birds*.¹ The *Sibley Guide* has smaller pages and exclusively uses the author's reprinted paintings to illustrate the birds. Sibley's guide does show more variations (adult/juvenile, gender, seasonal, regional) of bird species than *Birds of North America*. However, in my opinion, *Birds of North America* is superior because of the larger illustrations, greater emphasis on natural history of bird species, and a more attractive and reader-friendly layout.

The publisher pitches *Birds of North America* as a bird guide, but it is too large and heavy for regular use in the field. Instead, it is more of a reference book that strongly complements existing bird field guides. It has a sturdy hard cover binding that should last for a long time. Aside from a few minor deficiencies, this is a very useful and beautiful volume. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is a keen birder or who wants to learn more about the birds of North America.

1. SIBLEY, DAVID A. 2000. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, New York.

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The day I see a leaf is a marvel of a day.

-Kenneth Patton