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THE GREAT GRAY OWL — PHANTOM OF THE NORTHERN FOREST

ROBERT W. NERO. Photographs by
ROBERT R. TAYLOR. 1980.
Washington, Smithsonian Institution
Press. 168 pp. \$20.95.

Throughout recorded history, owls have held an unusual fascination for man, disproportionate to their numbers. Bob Nero has chosen to write about perhaps the most enchanting owl of all, and the "sixth most wanted bird" that members of the American Birding Association would like to add to their life lists.

The Great Gray Owl for years was thought to be one of the rarest of western Canada birds. As a species in risk of extinction, it was considered second only to the Whooping Crane. When Nero moved to Winnipeg in 1966 he had never seen a Great Gray Owl. He has since proved that this most beautiful of owls is not as rare as everyone had thought; in some areas of the mixed forest, especially east of Winnipeg, it is actually the commonest owl!

The book opens with Nero's visit to the second recorded Manitoba nesting site of the Great Gray Owl near The Pas, and then tells what a thrill it has been for others to see their first Great Gray. It continues with accounts of Great Gray visits to the residential area of Winnipeg, the exciting refinement of winter capture techniques, the history of the species in North America, and a description of

the bird and its voice. Life history chapters then include: how it captures mice and voles after hearing them beneath the snow by plunging deeply into the snow; its enemies; courtship and pair formation; nesting; nest habitat and nest sites. The book concludes with chapters on artificial nest platforms, and on future threats to the species posed by draining of bogs, removal of peat, and logging of tamarack.

Each of these 13 chapters begins with an introductory essay which sets the mood. We may expect to encounter these again in future anthologies.

Nero has searched the literature thoroughly, and quotes appropriately from many observers. He tells how the first Great Gray Owl specimen was sent back to England by Andrew Graham from Severn River post on Hudson Bay in 1771, and how Dr. John Richardson found the first nest at Great Bear Lake in 1826. He tells of the nests found during this century at Belvedere, Alberta, by A. D. Henderson, and of others in northern Sweden.

In many aspects of human endeavour, those things done for love may be more richly rewarding than those done for money. This book is such an endeavour. Although Nero is employed during the week as a research scientist with the Manitoba Department of Natural Resources, and his assistant Herb Copland is an employee of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, only an obsessive love of their subject could have driven this pair out in all sorts of weather, for

the whole weekend, every weekend, all winter, with few exceptions, to study at their own time and expense a little known species.

The results are impressive. The first Great Gray Owl was banded in 1947 in Toronto, and as recently as 1956 I was proud to be the third person on the continent to band this species. In contrast, Nero and Copland banded 88 Great Gray Owls in the winter of 1978-9 and then another 22 in the 1979 spring nesting season, for a total of 110 banded in eight months.

The book contains very few errors. The year of Oeming's thesis and the article by Kapten Wahlberg are omitted from the references; Aylmer, Ontario, is misspelled.

The book is dedicated to John T. Mullen, Jr., Nero's senior professor who supervised his thesis on Red-winged Blackbird behaviour between 1948 and 1953. There is an appropriate foreword by George E. Watson, curator of birds at the Smithsonian.

This is probably the most beautiful book ever published about a single bird species. It is a superb example of how to present the results of intensive research in an interesting manner for layman and scientist alike.

And the photography! Robert R. Taylor of Winnipeg has again demonstrated that he is one of the continent's leading wildlife photographers. No less than 30 of his color photographs and 57 of his black-and-white photographs are included in this book. Every aspect of this magnificent owl is portrayed in word and picture, a sumptuous and unsurpassed visual feast.

The Smithsonian Institution Press deserves accolades for their unflinching efforts to produce this fine book. It will be read for pleasure and for information, but in addition it cannot help sensitizing each reader to

ecologic relationships and the conservation ethic. Well done, Bob! — Reviewed by C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0J8.

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS EAST OF THE ROCKIES

R. T. PETERSON. 1980. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 384 pp. \$12.95 paperback; \$21.00 hard cover.

This is the best field guide for its region ever published. The only problem is that the region is not quite as claimed on the cover of the paperback — east of the Rockies — or as stated on the title page — eastern and *central* North America. Nor is the western boundary an ecological one as claimed on page 8. The book is, in fact, a complete revision of Peterson's eastern guide, concentrating on birds east of the 100th meridian — 60 miles east of the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border. So, how good is it for the Prairie Provinces?

It includes about 90% of the birds found in Alberta (missing 31 species) and almost 95% of Saskatchewan species (23 omitted). Those missing are mainly birds associated with the Cypress Hills, foothills and mountains. Six Manitoba species are omitted.

The 34 Prairie Province species that I found missing are (A = Alberta, S = Saskatchewan, M = Manitoba): Trumpeter (AS) and Bewick's Swans (S), Blue Grouse (A), White-tailed Ptarmigan (A), Sage Grouse (AS), Chukar (AS), Common Crane (A), Mountain Plover (AS), Wandering Tattler (A), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

(AS), Glaucous-winged Gull (A), Ancient Murrelet (M), Band-tailed Pigeon (AS), Pygmy Owl (A), Black Swift (A), Calliope Hummingbird (AS), Lewis' Woodpecker (ASM), Williamson's Sapsucker (AS), Hammond's (A), Dusky (AS), and Western (A) Flycatchers, Western Pewee (ASM), Violet-green Swallow (ASM), Steller's Jay (AS), Clark's Nutcracker (ASM), Mountain Chickadee (AS), American Dipper (AS), Bendire's (S) and Sage (AS) Thrashers, Townsend's (AS) and MacGillivray's (AS) Warblers, Cassin's (A) and Gray-crowned Rosy (ASM) Finches, and Brewer's Sparrow (AS).

What about the illustrations? There are 136 plates in this book compared to 60 in the western Peterson and 157 in Robbins (which covers all of North America).^{3 5} Table 1 compares the number of illustrations for six of the larger, more common or more difficult groups of Prairie Province species in the three guides. While the Robbins guide is more complete and more profusely illustrated, its colour reproduction is often poor, in my experience.

The new plates, most with four to six species each, permit larger figures and more detail. The plates still have the advantage over Robbins of using arrows to point out diagnostic field marks. All the pictures are in colour except for eleven plates of waterfowl, shorebirds and diurnal birds of prey — all flying — most of which are also

shown in colour on other plates. Colour reproduction is excellent. However, before buying this new guide check pages 153 (accipiters) and 221 (bluebirds); in some copies these plates, at least, are paler than others. It may be that in all copies the phoebe-pewee plate appears to be too gray. The last seven plates depicting 99 accidentals from around the world (but not from western North America) and aviary escapees.

Some species are depicted differently than in the western Peterson, e.g., head pattern of the winter Eared Grebe and the amount and size of spotting on Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes (an improvement). The inclusion of a young Chipping Sparrow is good but the omission of an immature White-throat is unfortunate. Also not included are different forms of Red-tailed and Ferruginous Hawks as seen from below.

Another improvement is that the text now faces the illustrations, as in Robbins. It still contains information on description, similar species, voice, world-wide range and habitat, condensed to about half that of the western Peterson; nest data are omitted. Because of their nature and because people hear them differently many bird songs are difficult to describe in words. I have listened to recorded calls of Boreal Owls from Sweden², Germany¹, and Edmonton (R. E. Gehlert, personal tape) — all similar — but I could not have identified

Table 1. COMPARISON OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN THREE FIELD GUIDES.

Group	<i>No. of species illustrated</i>			<i>No. of different illustrations</i>		
	<i>Western</i>	<i>Eastern</i>	<i>Robbins</i>	<i>Western</i>	<i>Eastern</i>	<i>Robbins</i>
Waterfowl	37	38	38	184	292	289
Hawks - eagles	19	20	20	67	109	104
Shorebirds	39	41	44	103	178	187
Gulls	13	17	16	28	84	68
Warblers	26	33	35	44	101	157
Sparrows	20	19	20	31	37	60

ed them from Peterson's description
a "high-pitched bell or dripping of
water" or "ting-ting-ting . . .". The
Handbook of British Birds does a
much better job: "repetition (2-3 secs)
a single . . . musical note . . . 'poo-
poo-poo-poo . . .'," which description
largely repeated in Peterson's
European bird guide.^{7 4}

Another innovation is the addition
390 maps for breeding, migration
and wintering ranges *east of the 100th
meridian in North America*. With only
1000 words per page, the maps have the ad-
vantage of showing state and provin-
cial boundaries. For some species
nesting only in the Arctic, breeding
ranges are shown almost to the
Arctic Circle. The map section is of little use
for birdwatchers in Alberta and
Saskatchewan but is excellent for
Manitoba. A comparison of Peter-
son's Manitoba breeding ranges with
those in *The Birds of Alberta* shows
major differences only for Great Blue
Heron, Black Duck, Golden Eagle,
Sandhill Crane, Magnolia Warbler,
Rusty Blackbird and Rose-breasted
 Grosbeak.⁶ There are no maps for
California Gull and Mountain
Bluebird.

This paperback is well bound, con-
tributing to its cost. However, it will
not fall apart like so many soft-cover
Robbins'. There is a good introduc-
tory chapter on identifying birds, in-
cluding three cautionary paragraphs
on sight records. Omitted from the
"field list" provided at the front of the
book are Prairie Falcon, Red-headed
Woodpecker, Green-tailed Towhee
and Golden-crowned Sparrow.

One possible drawback is the se-
quence of plates — from swimming
birds to waders to terrestrial species.
Some parts of this arrangement are dif-
ficult to understand: cormorants and
pelicans are 38 pages apart; coots
and gallinules occupy a plate in the
middle of waterfowl but not adjacent to
similarly coloured scoters; grouse

precede birds of prey; longspurs and
juncos are just before cardinals and
other colourful finches. Why are
shrikes not on the same page as
mockingbird and solitaire? The index
may be the fastest way to find some
species for a while.

Then there are some birds' names.
"Common Egret", used in both the
western Peterson and Robbins, does
not appear in the new guide; it is the
"Great Egret". Marsh Hawk appears
as Northern Harrier. Slate-colored
and Oregon Juncos which were com-
bined into Dark-eyed Juncos a few
years ago are listed here as Northern
Juncos. Short-billed and Long-billed
Marsh Wrens become Sedge and
Marsh Wrens, respectively. There are
other, more easily interpreted,
changes.

In spite of the above criticisms, if
you can live without the missing
species, you will find that this is the
best field guide for Canadian birds
east of the Rockies. — Reviewed by
Bernard Gollop, Canadian Wildlife
Service, 115 Perimeter Road,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0X4.

¹HARDY, J. W. 1980. Voices of New World
nightbirds. Owls, nightjars and their
allies. Bioacoustic Archive, Florida
State Museum, Gainesville, Fla. (12"
LP).

²KELLOGG, P. P. 1975. A field guide to
western bird songs. Houghton Mifflin,
Boston. (Cassette 1, Side B).

³PETERSON, R. T. 1969. A field guide to
western birds. Houghton Mifflin,
Boston. 366 pp.

⁴PETERSON, R., G. MOUNTFORT and P.
A. D. HOLLON. 1974. A field guide to
the birds of Britain and Europe.
Collins, London. 344 pp.

⁵ROBBINS, C. S., B. BRUUN and H. S. ZIM.
1966. A guide to field identification —
birds of North America. Golden
Press, New York. 340 pp.

⁶SALT, W. R. and J. R. SALT. 1976. The
birds of Alberta with their ranges in

Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Hurtig, Edmonton. 498 pp.

7WITHERBY, H. F., F. C. R. JOURDAIN, N. F. TICEHURST and B. W. TUCKER. 1943. The handbook of British birds. Vol. 2. Witherby, London. 368 pp.

BIRDER'S GUIDE TO SOUTHEASTERN MANITOBA

NORMAN J. CLEVELAND, CALVIN W. CUTHBERT, GORDON D. GRIEF, GEORGE E. HOLLAND, PHILIP A. HORCH, RICHARD W. KNAPTON, RUDOLF F. KOES, NANCY F. MURDOCH, WAYNE P. NEILY, and IAN A. WARD. 1980. Eco Series No. 1, Manitoba Naturalists Society, 214, 190 Rupert Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0N2. 5½x8½, 58 pp., paperback, \$4.95.

The front cover carries a charming painting, in colour, of a Connecticut Warbler by R. F. Koes and, on the back cover, there is a fine colour photograph of a Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker by Denis Fast. Andy Lindsay and Phil Horch have contributed several black-and-white photographs to enhance an attractive publication.

An addition to the increasing number of "where-to-go-and-bird" guides being published these days, this one will be a tremendous boon to visitors to southeastern Manitoba intent on sampling the rich avian fare to be found there. Ten pages are devoted to descriptions of such birding Meccas as Delta Marsh, Oak Hammock Marsh, Victoria Beach, Assiniboine Park, La Barrière Park, and St. Adolphe Bridge (for hawks). Directions are given for reaching the sites, the best places for birds, and

some of the birds to be seen. The maps by Ian Ward are to be appreciated.

The area between Winnipeg and the Ontario-Manitoba boundary generally described as the Bore Forest — is a major birding region and thus receives five pages of detailed directions. The regions north and south of the Trans-Canada Highway are described as Eastern Routes One and Two respectively.

Eastern Route One covers about 332 km (206 miles) but there are several tempting side trips offered with delectable lists of birds. A considerable stretch goes through Whiteshell Provincial Park with shorter parts of the route through Agassiz and Sandilands Provincial Forests.

Eastern Route Two is 400 km (248 miles) and is a different kind of operation. The authors warn birders to fill gas tanks and take food and insect repellent as service stations and restaurants are scarce, especially along Route Two. The latter Route takes one into Northwest Angle Provincial Forest in the extreme southeastern corner of Manitoba, and back through Sandilands Provincial Forest. The "Manitoba Vacation Guide 1980-81" (available from Tourism Branch, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg, Man. R3C 1T5) lists hotels or motels at Hadashville (at the start of Route Two), Sprague and Vass (near the U.S. Boundary), though nothing until Steinbach, 46 km from Winnipeg. This is in contrast to the accommodation to be found on Route One, which is relatively plentiful.

While it may be all right for Manitobans to zip through the Route in one day each, strangers from the prairies of "Outer Canada" should surely take two days for each Route since the birds, wildflowers, and other facets of natural history promise to

ndlessly fascinating. For example, his is Great Gray Owl country, immortalized by Bob Nero in his book *The Great Gray Owl: Phantom of the Northern Forest* (1980, Smithsonian Institution Press, \$21.00). If one is not ed to Winnipeg it seems to me that a ase in one of the two 4-star hotels at adashville, or further west at Falcon lake or in Whiteshell Provincial Park, ould enable one to drive the best of he two Routes as a Figure 8 — asinating thought!

The remainder of the book describes such "Summer Specialties" s Black Duck, Goshawk, Yellow Rail, Woodcock, Whip-poor-will, Yellow-throated Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Northern Parula, Pine Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Orchard Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Inigo Bunting; "Fall and Winter Specialties" include Spruce Grouse, Turkey, Hawk Owl, Great Gray Owl, boreal Owl, Black-backed and orthern Three-toed Woodpeckers, ary Redpoll, Smith's Longspur. The species list" is illustrated with bar aphs by Gordon Grief.

Whatever your interest, by all eans buy a copy of *Birder's Guide to outheastern Manitoba* — you will nd it to be an invaluable aid. — eviewed by *Frank Brazier*, 2657 ameron St., Regina, Saskatchewan T 2W5.

PENGUINS

DOGER TORY PETERSON. 1979. oughton Mifflin Company, Boston, ass. 238 pp. \$25.00.

This beautifully illustrated book by e of the world's most honoured aturalists is a delight to read. ofusely illustrated with his beautiful

photographs and delightful sketches, it is easy reading and the reader is not burdened with a lot of figures and statistics.

Peterson tells us that penguins are his favourite family of birds. He has made a dozen or more expeditions to study and observe all 17 species in their natural habitats, which range from the ice-fields of Antarctica to as far north as the Galapagos Islands on the equator.

All species are nicely portrayed on the inside covers, distinctively showing the field marks for separating some of the species. The species are grouped in six genera as follows: Jackass or Harlequin Penguins including Jackass, Magellanic, Peruvian and Galapagos; Pygoscelid Penguins including Adelie, Gentoo and Chinstrap; Crested Penguins including Rock-hopper, Macaroni, Royal, Erect-crested, Fiord-land and Snares; Large Penguins including Emperor and King; Yellow-eyed Penguins and Little Blue Penguins. They range in size from nearly 4 feet in the Emperor, weighing about 80 pounds, to 15-16 inches in the Little Blue, weighing up to 3 pounds.

Apparently the origin of the name "Penguin" is rather obscure. Early Spanish and Portuguese sailors knew the Great Auk as "pinguin" and may have transferred this name to these birds. The reference to the Breton and Welsh fishermen referring to them as PEN (white) and GWYN (head) is dismissed. (Incidentally, the foregoing translation of these two words is probably in error, being reversed.)

This book discusses the penguins' history and prehistory. Each species is separately described in its environment, including its trials and tribulations, predators and other enemies. In addition, their bird neighbours, such as skuas, albatrosses, petrels, and Cape Pigeons are detailed and their

relationship to penguins discussed. Elephant Seals share the habitat of many penguins and Leopard Seals take their toll of the birds. One chapter describes their northern look-alikes which share the same hazardous type of environment.

The last chapter describes the interaction of penguins with man. Since the time of early explorers, da Gama and Magellan, penguins were slaughtered by the hundreds of thousands by explorers making passage around Cape Horn. Many native peoples relied on and regularly gathered eggs in season. Oil-extracting plants were set up in the Falkland Islands and it is conservatively estimated that 2.5 million birds were killed in that venture. Penguin skins were quite popular for leather goods until recently. A more modern threat to the Jackass Penguins, in particular, is OIL. When the Suez Canal was closed in 1967, oil tankers were forced to take the long route around Cape of Good Hope. Three major tanker disasters resulted in casualties of as many as 1700, 14,000 and 19,000 penguins.

The populations of most species are considered quite stable: perhaps the most endangered species is the Peruvian Penguin. Commercial exploitation of the guano beds there is destroying their burrows. — Reviewed by *Wilfred S. Richards*, 272 Gladmer Park, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7J 2X3.

THE GANNET

BRYAN NELSON, 1978. Buteo Books, P.O. Box 481, Vermillion, South Dakota. 336 pp. \$25.00 U.S.

This is a fine monograph on the North Atlantic Gannet, one of

Canada's largest and most spectacular seabirds. Nelson's long and detailed research on gannets at Bass Rock, Scotland, is the basis for the authoritative and readable text; indeed he is the world's expert on the species and the family *Sulidae*.

Much information on the six Canadian colonies is found in the book under each chapter topic: plumage, shape, structure and voice; numbers and distribution; behaviour; ecology; the gannet at sea; the gannet family and the order; and, the gannet and man. The numerous tables, maps, photographs and drawings add a great deal to the quality and usefulness of the book. The point-form summary found at the end of every chapter but the last is handy.

If you are interested in seabirds this book will be a valuable addition to your library; undoubtedly it will be a major reference for years to come. If you read it, you may be encouraged to visit Bonaventure Island located off the tip of the Gaspé Peninsula, Quebec, site of the largest (about 17,000 pairs), best known and most accessible gannetry in North America — Reviewed by *Philip S. Taylor*, 1714 Prince of Wales Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 3E5.



Sketch from *The Gannet* by John Busby