



Semipalmated Sandpiper
G.W. Beyersbergen

FIELD GUIDES COMPARISON

Birdwatchers in the field need a book which is simple and concise, but also complete with all species and all significant plumages. Peterson's book was once the birdwatcher's bible, but it covers only the eastern part of the continent and thereby doesn't contain a number of species which occur in Saskatchewan. The range maps are poorly located at the back of the book, and in most cases don't show anything west of central Manitoba. The Robbins *et al* entry is the least expensive of the four. It covers the whole continent and includes a number of vagrants. The maps are coloured and easy to read, and the sonograms are an interesting feature, for those who can read them. Generally, this is an excellent book for the novice birder. The National Geographic guide is much like the Robbins book: full-continent, good maps in colour, checklist in the index. Its coverage of vagrants is considerably more complete, and the number of

illustrations of different plumages and forms a bit more extensive than Robbins. Overall it is the best field guide for a birder of any level of experience. The Audubon Society books are not really field guides — they are surely too heavy. The three-volume set gives a well-detailed account of each species which occurs regularly in North America, and accidentals are dealt with in less detail at the back of each volume. The illustrations are mainly photos; these are very good for confirming field marks, but overall visual treatment of forms and plumages is less extensive than the Geographic guide. The Audubon books are a very good alternate reference for avid birders when when considering rare bird sightings, but for the average or novice birder I would recommend the National Geographic guide or the Robbins book.

— Christopher J. Escott, 271 Sylvian Way, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7H 5G1

FOUR "NEW" FIELD GUIDES FOR SASKATCHEWAN'S BIRDS

How do the new guides rate for identifying birds in Saskatchewan? All have positive points and unfortunately all have negative points. Peterson unfortunately does not cover all of the species found in Saskatchewan; that is its major drawback. The illustrations are excellent, text excellent, range maps adequate and organization good (similar species on same or nearby pages). Robbins' book has adequate illustrations, poor text, good range maps, and good organization, and it covers all of Saskatchewan's species as do the following two guides. The

National Geographic Guide has good illustrations which cover a greater variety of plumages (i.e. subspecies and varieties), adequate text, adequate maps and good organization. The Audubon Master Guide uses primarily photos for illustrations and many of these are not adequate, the text is excellent, maps good and organization poor.

Which would I take in the field with me? Unfortunately all four and a pack-horse! I do not trust any one guide because of inconsistencies between them. If I had to choose one, probably the National Geographic Guide, then Robbins, followed by the Master Guide (in spite of its cumbersome size) and unfortunately Peterson last. I say unfortunately because I prefer the Peterson illustrations and guide organization but do not like getting caught having a guide which may not illustrate what I may see. — *Wayne C. Harris*, Box 414, Raymore, Saskatchewan. S0A 3J0

FIELD GUIDE PREFERENCE

The following is a ranking of three recently released field guides in order of my preference.

My favourite is the National Geographic Society's. This book contains North American species plus an impressive number of stragglers. The degree of coverage of subspecies is an outstanding feature. The thirteen artists portray generally accurate, detailed and richly colored illustrations, however the variance in style is sometimes distracting. Most plates contain examples of both sexes seasonal plumages, immatures, readily identifiable subspecies and flight

views. Group plates provide direct comparisons with similar species. The flying ducks are my favourite. The side view allows one to see the birds as they appear "flying by", with the underside and the top of the wing shown in one figure. (This is in contrast to the Golden Guide's gliding or banking bird, requiring two illustrations.) A major weakness is the lack of diagnostic arrows as quick visual reference for identification. Maps show state and provincial boundaries and the text, though brief contains much information.

My second choice is the revised, expanded Golden Guide (Robbins, et al), now containing illustrations and written references for Alaskan and Florida stragglers in addition to North American residents including many subspecies. Some of the new plates are disappointing (i.e. the Alaskan peeps are not clearly illustrated or properly coloured). Several revised pages now seem crowded. Some stragglers are only illustrated in male nuptial plumage. The original plates are excellent but again this book does not feature diagnostic arrows. There are more voice sonograms, excellent range maps with migration routes and brief commentaries.

The Audubon Society's three volume set has a fundamental problem. Too many of the photos do not show critical diagnostic features although this guide does feature margin miniatures with diagnostic arrows. Fewer stragglers and subspecies are included. There are very few flight views. The small range maps do not show boundaries. Species information is provided by various regional and national experts. The text is better than the others, but the book is an expensive, limited reference source, with several reviews containing the same criticisms. — *Bob Luterbach*, 3040 18th Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4T 1W6