

---

# NATURE LIBRARY

---

## WHIP THREE BEER

This is an unsung appreciation of Robbins, Bruun and Zim *Birds of North America*. The recent reviews in the *Blue Jay* (Vol. 42: 3-13) of bird identification books by some of Saskatchewan's best-known ornithologists provided some helpful points for birders in deciding which one of several guides would best serve their purposes. It seems that the National Geographic is the most popular. As a casual birder, I would like to bring attention to a major and unique feature of the Robbins' *Birds of North America* guide that I feel makes it (along with other attributes) an outstanding guide book among the four that were reviewed. It is the depiction of bird songs in the form of sonagrams that makes the Robbins' guide particularly useful but which has been given short shrift by the reviewers. One reviewer excuses the sonagrams as "an interesting feature, for those who can read them". Perhaps this oversight is a bias created by too much dependence on open spaces in which to casually view birds but thinking of the Spragues Pipit I tend to discount this.

I suspect that, as with me, many amateur birders are drawn to the study of birds by their songs or calls. As a 'flatlander' on my first vacation to the northwoods of Saskatchewan, I still recall well my encounter with Poor Sam Peabody; it remained indelibly etched in my memory as a sense of the north woods although I never discovered its source until a long time afterward White-throated Sparrow).

Last week while hiking in a strange (to me) habitat of semi-open woodlands in British Columbia my acoustic senses connected me with a song that I had heard in similarly structured habitat in the Mackenzie River valley of the Northwest Territories. The two habitats were linked by a common acoustic element. The elements of the song were clear and unmistakable — *whip-three-beer* — although each song, a thousand miles apart, had its distinctive characteristics or dialect. I knew vaguely that the source was some nondescript flycatcher or vireo sitting somewhere in the tree tops but as a casual (lazy) birder I'm not often inclined to chase down the source, especially in heavy undergrowth. However, upon returning home I was able to verify to my satisfaction that the song was that of the 'Whip-Three-Bear' Flycatcher (Olive-sided to the die-hard birder), distinctly illustrated in the sonagram on page 202 of the old (reliable) *Birds of North America*.

I, too, have shared the intimidation imposed by the unfamiliar format of sonagrams but with a little attention and practice, the sonagrams open up a whole new challenge to our acoustic senses. Sonagrams are the only way of converting the acoustic signal into a comprehensible format (one step above Whip-Three-Bear) for visual inspection and verification. They are a valuable tool for identification and study of birds and their use should be encouraged. Robbins' provide a concise and comprehensible introduction to the use of sonagrams and several clear examples of songs that we can relate to. My only complaint with the guide is that the

Sprague's Pipit has still not received its proper due as the acoustic sense of the true prairie. After all, the British have their Skylark.

— *K. Finley*, Box 8, Luseland, Saskatchewan. SOL 2A0.

*Editor's Note:* The best guide to bird songs is a record or tape, many of which are available. Perhaps the best book guide is *North American bird songs — a world of music* by Poul Bondesen, 1977, Scandinavian Science Press, Klampenborg, Denmark. 254 pp. It describes the songs of more than 300 passerines arranged in the format of a key and has 225 sonagrams, each much larger than in Robbins' guide. Each song is described (1) in technical terms, e.g., staccato, crescendo, stroke-figures, etc. (with a glossary); (2) in terms such as whistled and buzzy and (3) with the catchphrases attached to many songs, e.g., "Oh, sweet Canada, Canada, Canada" and "Quick — three beers". Included is a list of more than 80 records of North American bird songs. The book is available from the Blue Jay Bookshop for about \$23.00 paperback.

## GUIDE DES OISEAUX D'AMÉRIQUE DU NORD

CHANDLER S. ROBBINS, BERTEL BRUUN and HERBERT S. ZIM. 1980. Translation Michel Desfrayes and Françoise Labelle-Broquet. Editions Marcel Broquet. LaPrairie, Québec. 351+ pp. 172 plates, maps facing; paper, \$16.50.

## GUIDE DES OISEAUX DE L'AMÉRIQUE DU NORD À L'EST DES ROCHEUSES

ROGER TORY PETERSON. 1984. Trans. Philippe Blain, André Cyr, Normand David, Michel Gosselin. Editions France-Amérique, Montréal. 384+ pp. 136 pages of plates, maps follow text; paper, \$17.95.

Here is your chance to bird-watch in French/Observer et identifier les

September 1984. 42(3)

oiseaux en français. These excellent French translations of the familiar Peterson (1980) and Robbins (1966) field guides are more or less verbatim, equally high quality versions of the originals (see reviews, *Blue Jay* 42: 3-13, 1984). Slightly smaller type and less white space make up for the somewhat wordier French text. Scientific, English and French names are given. The latter vary slightly in the two books. Peterson's guide uses the French names proposed by Ouellet and Gosselin (les noms français des oiseaux d'Amérique du Nord. Syllogus no. 43. Musée national des sciences naturelles du Canada. Ottawa. 1983) and Robbins' those set out by the Canadian Wildlife Service [publication hors-série no. 2 (1972) and no. 1 (1978)] and modified in 1980 by a committee of the Quebec Zoological Society. Both books supply European French names where they differ from the Canadian for holarctic species. Both are available from the Blue Jay Bookshop.

— Reviewed by *Mary D. Gilliland*, 902 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0K1.



*Canada Geese*

*G.L. Holroyd*



## THE MANTARIO HIKING TRAIL — WHITESHELL PROVINCIAL PARK

MANITOBA DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES, Parks  
Branch, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Febru-  
ary 1983. Paper \$2.00.

Backpackers seeking new wilder-  
ness adventures within the prairie  
provinces will be excited to learn of  
the Mantario Hiking Trail. Located in  
Manitoba's first designated wilder-  
ness zone the Mantario Trail stretches  
across over 60 km of rugged Pre-  
cambrian rock and forest.

Construction of the trail was fund-  
ed through the Federal Local Ini-  
tiatives Program with the co-opera-  
tion of the Manitoba Naturalists  
Society and the Manitoba Parks  
Branch. Part of the project entailed  
the completion of this brochure. The  
brochure provides hikers with essen-  
tial information and helpful hints  
including a 1:50,000 map of the route,  
a description of the trail, a back-  
packer's checklist, safety information  
and a brief description of the flora and  
fauna to be found along the trail. The  
brochure is made from Tyvek, a rip  
and water resistant material ideal for  
exposure to the elements.

The trail is recommended for experi-  
enced hikers only as it crosses a  
variety of terrains which are in a  
constant state of change throughout  
the seasons. The rewards of the trail's  
challenges are many, including the  
opportunity to experience the wilder-  
ness of the Manitoba Canadian Shield,  
to explore Jack Pine forests, hike  
through an aspen and Balsam Fir  
forest or observe a Bald Eagle, Moose  
or one of the many wildlife species in  
the area. — Reviewed by *Lin Gal-  
lagher*, Saskatchewan Parks and Re-  
newable Resources, 3211 Albert  
Street, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4S 5W6

---

## SOCIETY NEWS

---

### CORPORATE DONOR PROGRAM

Recently the Executive of the Saskat-  
chewan Natural History Society has  
established a Corporate Donor Pro-  
gram. The purpose of this program is  
to encourage donations to our Con-  
servation Fund from the business com-  
munity. These donations will be used  
to support the various conservation  
programs of the society including the  
Heritage Marshes Program and the  
Big Gully Creek Sanctuary.

We require the assistance of our  
members in making this program  
known to businesses in their area.  
Further information is available by  
writing to SNHS, Box 1784, Saska-  
toon, Saskatchewan. S7K 3S1

The Society wishes to acknowledge  
a donation of \$500 from the Saskat-  
chewan Mining Development Corpora-  
tion.

### 36TH ANNUAL MEETING

Saskatchewan Natural History Society

October 26 to October 28, 1984 at

**Melfort Heritage Inn**

Melfort, Saskatchewan

**October 26:**

Registration and slides, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

**October 27:**

Registration 8:00 a.m.

Business meeting & program 8:30 a.m.

Banquet 6:30 p.m.

Dance 9:00 p.m.

**October 28:**

Tours — Waterhen Marsh

— Eagle Lake

— Fort à la Corne