

### North American Waterfowl Management Plan

By the Canada-United States Steering Committee. 1985. Environment Canada and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Environment Canada, Ottawa. 37 pp., illus. Free.

Waterfowl are the most prominent and economically important group of migratory birds in North America, generating in excess of several billion dollars of expenditures annually. However, their migratory habits generate complex international overtones on their management and necessitate co-ordinated efforts between North and Central American nations. This North American Waterfowl Management Plan is a long-needed and optimistic attempt by a joint Canada-United States Steering Committee to identify major waterfowl management problems, establish objectives, and propose a series of strategies for solutions, all within a 15-year framework.

The plan concerns the 37 species of ducks, geese, and swans in the family Anatidae that regularly occur in both the United States and Canada. Biologists have determined that the loss and degradation of nesting, migration, and wintering habitat is the major waterfowl management problem in North America. Agricultural practices, industrial development, and summer recreation have reduced the quality and quantity of waterfowl habitat and have contributed to long-term downward trends in some important duck populations. This plan provides both general and specific strategies to achieve desired population objectives, primarily through acquisition and improvement of habitat, international fund raising, and education.

One of the goals of the plan is to continue to provide the two million or so active waterfowl hunters in the United States and Canada with their annual opportunity to harvest 20 million ducks, about one-fifth of the average fall flight. There are contingencies built into the plan to reduce this harvest if waterfowl population levels fall below predetermined levels. This plan points out one weakness in the continental approach to waterfowl management in that virtually no data exist on what role Mexico and the other Central American countries play in both the ecology and the harvest of waterfowl. Finally, the plan announces the establishment of a North American Waterfowl Advisory Committee to monitor and update the plan, co-ordinate current work, review new proposals, and suggest recommendations for actions within the scope of the plan to the federal wildlife agencies of Canada and the United States.

I strongly recommend this document to anyone who is concerned about waterfowl. As well as providing some interesting facts and figures, it will give the reader some insight into the current state of wildlife management and how legitimate biological concerns have to be tempered by today's political realities. We can only hope that the hopeful spirit of international co-operation so evident in this document will not drown in the same slough of political inertia that has claimed biologists' hopes for prompt action on the acid rain problem.

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### A Field Guide to Atlantic Coast Fishes of North America

By C. Richard Robins and G. Carleton Ray, illustrations by John Douglass and Rudolf Freund. 1986. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. xi + 354 pp. + 64 plates. U.S.\$14.95.

This is the latest volume in the Peterson Field Guide Series and follows the familiar format. There is also a *Field Guide to Pacific Coast Fishes of North America* (1983) and the freshwater guide is eagerly awaited. The Atlantic coast is taken to be that stretch of coast from the Canadian Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico. This includes Hudson Bay and the southern Arctic islands in the north, but fewer than one third of the Bahamian and Caribbean fishes are included for the south. There are no distribution maps, but since the guide encompasses coastal fishes, the northern and southern limits and depth distribution give an adequate measure of where fishes may be found.

The guide does not include freshwater fishes which rarely stray into brackish waters, or deepwater species and open sea species that stray into coastal waters. This still leaves over 1000 species, twice the number of bird species in eastern North America. These limitations were no doubt necessary to make the guide manageable.

Nevertheless, this large number of species makes identification a problem. Those users new to fishes would have to put in a lot of work to identify some species. Some families are notoriously more difficult than others, as any experienced ichthyologist can tell, but the guide does not always offer warnings.

The guide groups fishes having a similar appearance on plates, and arrows indicate distinguishing features. There is no indication of size on these plates, a character which can often eliminate species from



consideration when identifying. Some groupings are necessarily strange both to professionals and amateurs. Plate 8 has sturgeons, trouts, and lancetfish, all very different in appearance and well-separated in the text. I would have preferred a pictorial and text key to families to break the diversity into more manageable units. It might then have proved possible to have plates facing the text description, which is always the easiest format for using a guide.

The common names follow the 1980 American Fisheries Society checklist. Rarely are other common names included. I must admit to being a little vague on why a standard common name is needed. Scientific works must mention the scientific name or be regarded as less than scientific. As long as the common name is internally consistent to that work, it matters not to me what it is. Popular works on fishes are ever unlikely to be assiduous users of official common names. Fish are not birds where common names are fairly well fixed. In fishes intriguing and instructive agglomerations of common names can and are applied to a single species, sometimes usefully denoting life history stages. The variety of common names could have been included, in fine print, as an aid to local users without any particular increase in length of the book. Speckled trout, for example, is still often used for Brook Trout, *Salvelinus fontinalis*, but is not mentioned here. This can only be confusing to users unfamiliar with or overawed by scientific names. There are no French names provided.

The identification of closely related species could be enhanced by more text figures to show anatomical key characters. Such figures save the exasperating search

for the precise meaning of technical descriptive words, which are always a stumbling block for the amateur or casual user of guides. Some characters would leave even professionals confused: the distinction between shallowly forked and slightly forked is no doubt real but subtle.

Various errors occur through the book but these are not excessive. The Bonefish and Atlantic Sturgeon on plate 8 are not labelled. It is incorrect to state that the Blackspotted Stickleback has no bony plates on the sides. Plates are evident on the figure of this species and may extend along the whole flank in some American populations. The seagoing Atlantic or Acadian Whitefish, *Coregonus canadensis*, is omitted. Admittedly, it is now few in numbers because of acid rain and habitat alteration but it would have been nice to see this uniquely Canadian species included. Some keys do not work very well because they must generalize, a problem of all field guides, e.g. the Spot, *Leiostomus xanthurus*, a popular panfish, is distinguished by being the only drum in the area of the guide with a distinctly forked caudal fin. True enough for adults but not for smaller specimens. The index is arranged in that annoying way "Trout, Brook" with nothing under "Brook Trout".

Despite these quibbles, this is a most useful book serving as a rapid introduction to the diversity of Atlantic coast fishes.

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## A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent

By Sálím Ali and S. Dillon Ripley. 1983. Oxford University Press, Don Mills, Ontario. 177 pp., illus. \$35.75.

Given the reputation of the two authors, and the illustrator, John Henry Dick, I awaited the arrival of this book with great anticipation. The Bombay Natural History Society sponsored this work to provide an inexpensive, fully illustrated guide to the birds of the Indian subcontinent. This, they felt, would fill a much needed gap in Indian bird literature, and thereby enhance public awareness and conservation. Unfortunately, I found the book very disappointing.

The book begins with a systematic index of families and species. There is a brief description of the general appearance, habits and habitat of each family. Following each description is a sequential list of the members of that family that occur in India. This

listing consumes 62 pages of precious space and does little to assist the observer in field identification.

There then follows 106 plates (34 in black and white and 72 in color). They are arranged with the plate on one page with the text on the opposite page. The authors state that descriptions have been omitted to save as much space as possible. Therefore, the text is limited to identifying the bird in English, with the accompanying Latin binomial, the size relationship to an abundant bird (such as crow or pigeon), and a very brief description of the habitat and geographical location. Each bird is given the species number which corresponds to the ten-volume *Handbook of Birds of Indian and Pakistan* (also by Ali and Ripley) so that they can be cross-referenced. This is followed by a number which identifies the illustration on the facing plate. The order of identification follows the





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