

Book Reviews

Ornithology in Ontario. 1994. Co-edited by *Martin K. McNicholl* and *John L. Cranmer-Byng*. Published by Ontario Field Ornithologists. Soft cover. 400 pp. \$24.95 + \$3.50 postage and handling from Ontario Field Ornithologists (see below).

Almost a decade ago, the Board of Directors of the Ontario Field Ornithologists conceived the idea of a publication covering the evolution and history of Ornithology in Ontario. In February 1994, the finished product rolled off the presses - a truly remarkable achievement by a contingent of unpaid, and often unappreciated, volunteers.

The tasks that confronted editors, and contributors, were infinite and at times seemingly insurmountable. Only the most dauntless organizers could have kept the venture afloat. A list of those who helped develop this publication is too long for inclusion here. All are identified within the book. We must, however, acknowledge and congratulate the co-editors, Martin K. McNicholl and John L. Cranmer-Byng for their indefatigable efforts. In addition to steering the project through rough seas, both made copious contributions to the text.

Being aware of the capabilities of those involved in this work, we expected a more than passable result. But, this 400-page volume surpasses anything we ever imagined. It is no exaggeration to say that the book is absolutely superb. The very title relates to such a vast, open-ended subject that simply deciding on the book's skeletal structure must have been a formidable challenge. This editorial dilemma has been handled with admirable success.

By its very nature, Ornithology demands great attention to detail. It is therefore, gratifying to note that the articles more than satisfy this element. Whether a chapter's theme relates to a person, a species of bird, or whatever, each contributor has covered his or her subject capably, and in great depth. Even the lists of literature reviewed and personal acknowledgements reflect an editorial regard for completeness. There are even 16 pages devoted to synopses of "Topics Not Covered in Detail". Now, that's thoroughness!

Having acquired, and refined, all pertinent manuscripts, the O.F.O. Executive, and especially the co-editors faced the problem of finding a publisher, or at least a job-printer to convert raw material into finished product. Alternatives were evaluated. Costs were a salient problem. What to do? It is here that we must single out one more name for special mention - that of Phill Holder, proprietor of Hawk Owl Publishing, based in Whitby, Ontario. O.F.O.'s good fortunes peaked when Holder volunteered to see the book through all its production stages. A keen bird student, and member of O.F.O., Phill took the ball from deep in the end-zone, all the way downfield - an unselfish and appreciated act that turned the whole project into success. Selection of paper, size of pages, quality and size of type, conversion of photos and drawings into professional-style production - items

that are often taken for granted - are all factors where Holder's assistance brought the fledgling from eclipse to radiant plumage.

We could compare the construction of this book to that of a sturdy three-storey building.

First comes the basement and foundation in the form of acknowledgements and the traditional foreward.

The ground floor is a series of 9 chapters averaging 18 pages each. Topics reflect a careful selection ranging from early historical data to special facets of Ornithology such as Oology and Bird-banding.

The second storey presents two suites of 10 divisions each. First comes a series of biographies of eminent Ontario ornithologists. These average 6 pages in length. Again, each biographer has been skillfully chosen. The second division is made up of 10 accounts of selected species whose status has varied in Ontario over time. These run about 10 pages each. Authors are well-known to O.F.O. members.

The penthouse/attic sections are 2 appendices, totalling 90 pages, devoted to more biographies. First comes an anthology of thumb-nail sketches of some 240 persons, no longer living, whose ornithological activities in Ontario were deemed worthy of inclusion. Then, the book finishes with a similar review of wildlife artists, both past and present.

The "windows" of this structure come in the form of delightful pen and ink drawings and photo reproductions. Some of the photos, such as one of P.A. Taverner, J.H.

Fleming and W.E. Saunders together in an informal setting, are priceless. Drawings range from very ordinary efforts to the excellence of Terry Shortt's Bobolink on the back cover.

Are there shortcomings and faults anywhere? Well, we found that these were minor. To pick them out was to resort to such nit-picking as inconsequential spelling errors - of which we found a few - or to second-guess decisions as to whose biographies should be included in Appendix I. We can only assume that McNicholl's desire to be as comprehensive as possible led to inclusions of non-residents like Van Tyne, Sutton and Murie, all of whom were indeed eminent scientists with at least some connection to Ontario's birds. But, to include them is to overlook dozens of others with similar qualifications. So, even here, the book goes "the extra mile" rather than falling short.

It must be pointed out that this is not a book to be read in one evening - or even two. Instead, it is a literary delight that should be digested a little at a time. Having read it through once, we immediately went through it again.

To order this book, mail remittance of \$28.45 per copy, payable to "Ontario Field Ornithologists", to S. Hadlington, 1 Harbour St., R.R. 3, Brighton, Ontario K0K 1H0.

We know of at least two Naturalists' Clubs who have ordered bulk lots. The book is the perfect gift to guest speakers. Quantity discounts on lots of a dozen or more copies are negotiable. Contact O.F.O. directly.

Gerry Bennett, R.R. 2, 10780 Pine Valley Drive, Woodbridge, Ontario L4L 1A6.

A Birder's Guide to Churchill. 1994. By *Bonnie Chartier*. American Birding Association, Inc. 132 pages, 16 maps, 21 original illustrations, 12 black-and-white and 14 colour photographs. \$14.95 U.S. + \$3.50 U.S. postage & handling. ABA Sales, Inc., Box 6599, Colorado Springs, CO 80934 USA.

Many Ontario birders get their first taste of subarctic birding at Churchill, Manitoba. Easily accessible by air and rail, with good motels and car rentals — it is a paradise of shorebirds, jaegers, Ross's Gulls, Pacific Loons, Harris's Sparrows, Smith's Longspurs, Willow Ptarmigans, and other tundra and boreal forest specialties.

This newly revised ABA/Lane Guide by Churchill resident, Bonnie Chartier, is packed with user-friendly maps, site guides, bar graphs and an annotated list of the birds of particular interest. In addition, there are lists of amphibians and mammals, butterflies, moths and a checklist of the vascular plants. The guide prepares the visiting birder to the region with brief overviews of the history, vegetation, accommodations, insect pests and other valuable information. Like the other guides in this series, it is well constructed for use in the field. For example, on a recent trip to Texas using two similar ABA/Lane guides, I found the wire-O

binding and the wrap around cover were very convenient and prevented excessive wear to the binding and pages under normal use in the field.

Bonnie Chartier clearly describes all the key birding areas. The text is comprehensive and easy to follow with a distinct touch of humour. The photographs and artwork capture the essence of the area and its birdlife. As a person interested in recognizable forms, I was surprised to see the illustration on page 61 of a male Spruce Grouse of the Franklin's subspecies (race) found in the Rocky Mountains!

I have birded Churchill twice, and after reviewing this guide now yearn to go again. It is absolutely essential for anyone planning a trip to Churchill. I also highly recommend the guide even if you just wish to dream about birding this subarctic outpost where tundra and boreal forest meet on the shores of Hudson Bay.

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