

Book Reviews

Ashbridge's Bay. By *George Fairfield* (editor). Toronto Ornithological Club, Toronto. Softcover, 136 pages. \$20 (plus \$3 postage and handling). Available from TOC, 322 Sheldrake Blvd., Toronto, Ontario M4P 2H8.

Ashbridge's Bay was a 560 hectare (1385 acre) marsh on the eastern Toronto waterfront. Originally, it extended about 4 kilometres (2.5 miles) from east (about Woodbine Avenue) to west (Toronto Harbour), and had a width of 1770 metres (1.1 miles) at its western end. Incredibly, this huge marsh is completely gone today, replaced by "a depressing wasteland of oil tanks, coal piles and shoddy, low industrial buildings separated by open parcels of contaminated land".

George Fairfield has gathered together twenty-four accounts in this anthology of writings about the Ashbridge's Bay area, in order "to preserve the story of a great wetland", "to warn communities not to throw away their natural heritage", and "to introduce the reader to some of the human denizens of the marsh". It succeeds admirably in all these stated purposes.

The book provides fascinating glimpses of an earlier time, through old maps, archival photographs and selected writings by authors such as Fred Bodsworth, Richard Saunders, Ernest Thompson Seton, Stuart

Thompson, and Robert Taylor. For instance, we learn that waterfowl were so numerous in the marsh "as to be an annoyance at night" due to their loud vocalizations, that Mrs. John Graves Simcoe set the marsh on fire "for amusement" on 27 January 1794, and that commercial hunters would trap up to 1000 Snow Buntings there in an afternoon to be sold for 5 cents each to local gun clubs for target practice! Of particular interest are sections by Ron Pittaway and Peter Burke on Cory's Least Bittern ("more than 50% of the world's records are from Ontario, mainly Toronto's Ashbridge's Bay"), and by John Carley on the nearby Leslie Street Spit ("the creation and preservation of a public urban wilderness"). In an encouraging note for the future, Carley suggests that "the creation of the Leslie Street Spit and its subsequent naturalization has somewhat redressed the tremendous loss of the marsh".

I found the book to be a fascinating and informative read. It is well bound and printed on attractive, glossy paper, and appears to be largely free of typographical errors. By way of minor criticism, I would note that all photographs of the site should have included a year (or at least an estimate) in the captions. In addition, some sections (e.g., Cory's Least Bittern, and Saw-whet Owls) have literature cited which is not

included in the Bibliography, which can be an irritation to those seeking more information.

I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in Ontario history, birding, and conservation.

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PUBLICATION NOTICE

Identification Guide to North American Birds. Part 1. 1997. By *Peter Pyle*. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, California. Softcover, 732 pages. \$42.00 American. Order by mail from Slate Creek Press, Box 219, Bolinas, CA, U.S.A. 94924, or by phone: (415) 868-1221, ext. 21.

This is a greatly expanded revision of *Identification Guide to North American Passerines* (1987) by Pyle, Howell, Yunick and DeSante. Described as "a synthesis of known and new information on identification, geographic variation, molt, ageing and sexing landbirds in the hand and the field", this volume treats 395 species from Doves through Weavers. While it will be of most use to banders and others identifying birds in the hand, there is a wealth of material here for the field birder who can master its complex text and terminology (which, of course, only reflect the real complexity of the birds themselves!).

The close to 1000 separate drawings are mainly of feather shapes and patterns, but include a few on subjects such as: relative size, shape, and colour of lower mandibles of *Empidonax* flycatchers; head patterns in Clay-colored, Chipping and Brewer's Sparrows; and facial plumage and tail patterns of Eastern and Western Meadowlarks. All recognized subspecies (857) are listed with brief descriptions of range and distinguishing characteristics, plus all known hybrids.

There are expanded and detailed sections on molt for all species, employing "a simplified molt terminology based on Humphrey and Parkes", which is well-described in the Introduction. The volume concludes with 2,442 cited references, a valuable guide to further reading. *Ron Tozer*