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Review of *The Birds of Canada, Revised Edition* by W. Earl Godfrey

Paul A. Kay
University of Waterloo

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The Birds of Canada. Revised Edition. W. Earl Godfrey. Ottawa, Ontario: National Museums of Natural Canada, 1986. 595 pp. Maps, illustrations, glossary, references, index. \$49.95 cloth.

Freezing temperature under a leaden sky, the season's first snow flurry, and lots of activity at my bird feeders—an opportune time to test the coffee-table volume *The Birds of Canada*. The portraits, painted by John A. Crosby, are as good as those in many of my multitude of field guides, although they are collected into sections between signatures rather than being juxtaposed to the species narratives. The birds are organized according to the American Ornithological Union's sixth check-list, and the usual information—description, field marks, habitat, nesting, range—is here. But Godfrey provides so much more: French names; detailed breeding and occurrence ranges in Canada, including maps of breeding distribution; detailed description and measurement of hand specimens; subspecies notes; even interesting tidbits of bird lore or personal experience that, at times, are as long as the scientific descriptions. This volume, indeed, is the book of record for the 578 species in Canada and its off-shore waters (at least 426 of which breed here).

The two-color maps of breeding range, when amalgamated in the mind's eye, reveal the Prairies as a distinct environment, either as a hole in the donut distribution of arboreal species, or as the donut-hole for grassland and prairie pothole breeders. Yet the maps are not all they could be. Some field guides, for example, use multiple colors or other cartographic devices to indicate seasonal ranges. A close reading of the range description, with reference to the end-paper maps of Canada, is needed to fill in the detail of the importance of the Plains for migration. Too, the artificiality of the 49th parallel as a boundary for natural distributions is painfully evident. For example, the Sandhill Crane appears here to be a bird of the northern margins of the Prairies, the forest, and the tundra; the southern Prairies and, by extrapolation, the Plains are the hole in the donut. The text tells of the “spectacular concentrations” in fall in south-central Saskatchewan,

but the equal spectacle in spring on the Platte River of Nebraska does not find space here.

Godfrey also provides a liberal dose of economic ornithology, sometimes quite opinionated. A strong conservationist streak is evident, as when he talks of extinct (Passenger Pigeon), presumed extinct (Eskimo Curlew), extirpated (Turkey), and nearly extinct (Whooping Crane) species. He points out that some species thought to be a threat to agriculture in fact eat weed seeds or insect pests and so are beneficial to farmers. Buteos are "extremely valuable" because they prey on rodents, but Accipiters (because they feed on birds that eat insects) "are among the few hawks that deserve the 'blame' that unfortunately has been heaped on hawks in general" (p. 137). The White Pelican is a tourist attraction for easterners to the Prairies and so "(t)his magnificent bird should not be destroyed for petty or imaginative reasons" (p. 53). The American Crow "is familiar to everyone, (but) very few have much good to say for it . . . the harm it does outweighs the good" (p. 395). "The introduction of the House Sparrow into North America was a mistake . . . It is a pugnacious ruffian" (p. 574). These are not the standard field guide fare. At times, these opinions lead to apparent contradictions. The introduction of the Starling is "an example of the inevitable blunders inherent in tampering with the delicate balance of nature" (p. 453), but the introduction of the Gray Partridge "has proved to be a great success in many parts of its new home" (p. 154). Perhaps gastronomy surpasses ecology as a criterion.

I won't be carrying this hefty volume into the field, but it certainly has an honored place between such standard references as Ehrlich et al. (1988) or Terres (1980) and my field guides. **Paul A. Kay**, *Department of Environment and Resources Studies, University of Waterloo*.

References

- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Terres, J. K. 1980. *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds*. New York, NY: Knopf.