

Birds of Canada

By: Tyler Hoar, Ken De Smet, and Wayne Campbell

Published by Lone Pine Publishing

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(Published in the Miramichi Leader September 29th 2010.)

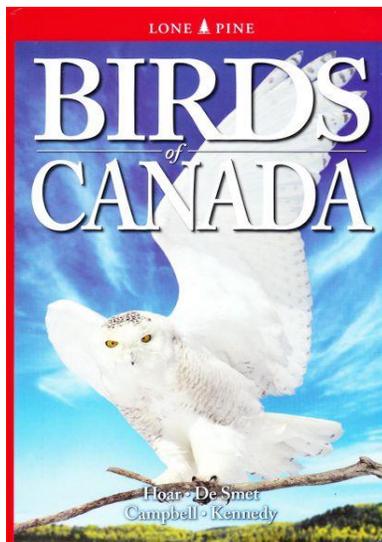
Until the 1980s, the Peterson Field Guides were the best source of information for identifying birds in the field. Since then we have seen half a dozen or more new books show up on the shelves.

Some of these are very intuitive with well laid-out pages and easy to find clues. Some are comprehensive with pages crammed full of text and illustrations showing the birds in different stages of life and in different seasons.

Some are large and heavy and destined to remain on the shelf by the patio door while others are smaller with durable bindings for use in the field.

Another book, called **Birds of Canada**, has just been published. The authors have provided a guide that focuses on birds found in Canada from coast to coast to coast.

As it is with most books of this type, this book is the result of a collaborative effort. In this case it's the result of the research, the knowledge and the experience of authors Tyler Hoar, Ken De Smet, R. Wayne Campbell and Gregory Kennedy.



The first thing I noticed about this book is its cover. The front of the dust jacket sports a beautiful photo of a Snowy Owl by photographer Jean Chiasson. The back of the cover has a quick colour coded reference guide to find birds by families such as shorebirds, wood warblers, flycatchers, etc.

The second thing that I noticed is the weight of the book. It's a little on the heavy side due to the quality of the paper and the ink. This alone would give most birders reason enough to leave it at home and take a less weighty field guide to the marsh. The paperback version is slightly smaller and therefore should be quite a bit lighter without compromising any of the information. It has the same layout with the same number of pages (528) but is 6 by 9 inches instead of the 6 ¼ by 9 ¼ inches for the hardcover. The size of most other field guides is somewhere around 5 by 8 inches.

The Introduction consists of 22 pages of maps, photographs, general information and a list of birding hotspots from across Canada. The details here go over and above what you would expect to find in a field guide and should be valuable to birders of all levels for the information they give.

At the beginning of the book is a 17 page reference guide to all the birds in the book except for the rare visitors mentioned in the appendix. For each bird there is a small illustration along with its size in centimeters and the page where the bird is found within the book. This is really an index which makes the other one at the back of the book somewhat redundant.

The core of the book is of course the guide to the different birds with one species per page only. I like the fact that both a photo and an illustration of each bird are included. In some cases there are two drawings when a second one of the bird in flight will show characteristics useful to the identification. The range map is easy to use with different colours denoting migration, Summer and Winter.

Also on each page is a the key information to help identify the bird in the field such as habitat, feeding and such but it also includes a paragraph of around 20 lines with a lot of other information you would not find in most other guides. This might be information on sub-species in certain parts of its range or that a bird is in decline in a region or expanding its range in another. Other times they have included anecdotal information on peculiar behavior or historical references.

Here is a brief example of what is found on the Cape May Warbler: *Cape May Warblers require forests that are at least 50 years old for secure nesting habitat and an abundance of canopy-dwelling insects. The Cape May Warbler holds the feeding rights to the very tops of the spruces and throughout most of their almost exclusively Canadian breeding range, these small birds seem to be spruce budworm specialists...*

Most of the illustrations are very good but there are some that lack definition however they are still very useful. In my opinion the photos complementing the illustrations are a plus and for the most part they are sharp and with good lighting.

An added bonus is a full bird checklist at the back that can be use as a bird lifelist. Also at the back is a glossary of terms used in the book which I would find useful.

My overall impression of the book is that it is somewhere in between a coffee table book and a field guide. Although it could be used for field identification I don't think I would like to carry it on a long hike. If I were to use this as a field guide I would get the softcover version.

In a nutshell, I find the high price is justified because of the quality and the fact that it's just a beautiful book. It would also make a unique gift for anyone who is interested in birds.

The suggested price for this book in hardcover is \$39.95 and \$32.95 for softcover.