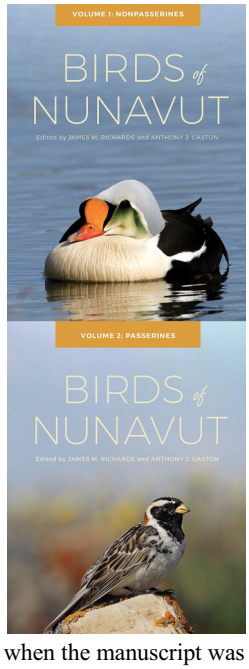
The Birds of Nunavut, Volume 1: Nonpasserines, Volume 2: Passerines

Edited by James M. Richards and Anthony J. Gaston. 2018. University of British Columbia Press. 820 pages, 805 colour photos, and 155 maps, 125.00 CAD, Cloth or PDF, 150.00 CAD, Cloth and PDF.



The Birds of Nunavut is a beautiful and comprehensive two-volume tome that documents the current and historical knowledge of birds known to occur within the territorial boundaries of Nunavut. This is a work of very considerable effort and integration involving 18 co-authors, 805 stunning colour photos, and 155 maps. The Foreword by Jason Akearok, Executive Director of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, grounds the effort with a holistic and interactive Inuit perspective on birds, wildlife, environment, and conservation. I have had the double opportunity of working with UBC Press when the manuscript was in production and of now reviewing the finished product.

Volume 1 overviews the territory's ecology, ornithological history, protected areas, monitoring activity, and anthropogenic and climatic threats. It also details the accounts of non-passerine species and is the larger book at 499 pages. Passerine accounts are laid out in Volume 2. For species that breed in Nunavut, each account opens with a synopsis of the species' range and general characteristics, a territorial distribution map, and sections on Appearance, Subspecies, Distribution, Where to See It, Behaviour, Habitat, Diet and Foraging, Phenology, Breeding, and Canadian Status and Threats. Photographs of species that breed in Nunavut include varied combinations of morphs, sexes, winter-plumaged birds, immatures, juveniles, nests and eggs, and young. For species that do not breed in the territory, sections on Distribution and Occurrence in Nunavut are included with photographs of breeding plumaged adults.

Massive in area, Nunavut, like so many other geographic jurisdictions, has some sharply delineated straight and rigidly angled boundaries; the western borders sever continuous ecological expanses and, hence, avian distributions. Owing to small local human aggregations and to research sites and protected areas that are ecologically distributed over most of the territory, key areas stand out as ornithological information hotspots. The hottest ones, as expected in terms of diversity and rarity occurrences, tend to be located near southern boundaries (e.g., Akimiski, Charlton, and Twin islands in James Bay). Yet, with huge uninhabited areas and with major active research sites, there is implied excitement of the bird information yet to be tapped.

The Birds of Nunavut establishes a firm benchmark from which expected changes can be gauged and periodically updated with supplemental checklists. The ongoing and incrementing flow of bird knowledge and doc-

umentation mean that geographic bird compilations, however thorough, are essentially outdated before they are published. Thus it is essential for an endeavour of this nature to offer a way forward. With this consideration in mind at the outset, the editors suggest that new observations be submitted to the Canadian Wildlife Service in Yellowknife or to www.eBird.ca. This approach will go a long way in maintaining real-time as well as long-term information about the birds in Nunavut.

While the two volumes have the dimensions and elegance of coffee table books, species accounts are presented in a compelling identification format. The *Birds of Nunavut* has all the makings of a first rate, high quality field guide—descriptions, image quality, and informative distribution maps. So considering yet another way forward, *The Birds of Nunavut* provides a natural substantial framework for a downsized pocket field guide. The existing components need only be distilled to a smaller more portable format. While it is so much easier to envision such a suggestion than to execute it, the editors and publisher might want to consider such an option. Such effort could bring the identification, occurrence, and distributional information directly into the hands of people in the field, where usage and feedback about the birds of Nunavut could be maximized.

On reviewing the prepublication version of this book for UBC Press and again here, my big disappointment with *The Birds of Nunavut* is its rather matter-of-fact attention to many conservation issues and its relative paralysis in offering constructive possibilities for robust conservation initiatives. The omission and lack of even a mention of the warm water run-offs into James Bay from the massive hydro-electric development in northern Quebec and potential synergisms with a changing ocean is totally baffling. For some time, we have been well aware of the risks and consequences of these warm freshwater outflows into James and Hudson Bays (e.g., Prinsenberg 1980; Milko 1986), leading to fresher sea water, thinner sea ice, and closing polynyas with major effects on marine birds, mammals, and fishes and resulting consequences for aboriginal people and their communities. While the authors recognize the extreme importance of a wintering aggregation of eiders in a local polynya for the residents of Sianikiluag in the Belcher Islands, they fail to mention that the warm freshwater from the hydro development is causing the polynya to freeze over (https://arcticeider.com/en/knowledge-solutions#?tab=knowledge&section=collapseOne#collapseOne). The game has changed for all of us, and the time for business as usual is over; crisis management is now essential at every step of the way. We have to recognize and address major human-induced threats to wildlife and our environment and offer constructive possibilities to act on them. Otherwise, it is just not going to happen.

I have many geographic bird books in my library—*The Birds of Nunavut* is the best one. Given the nature of the subject in our current pivotal state of changing climate, *The Birds of Nunavut* offers more than just another book about birds; it is an invitation to engage in an ongoing rapidly changing environmental process.

Literature Cited

Milko, R.. 1986. Potential ecological effects of the proposed GRAND Canal Diversion Project on Hudson and James Bays. Arctic 39: 316–326. https://doi.org/10.14430/arctic2094

Prinsenberg, S.J. 1980. Man-made changes in the freshwater input rates of Hudson and James Bays. Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 37: 1101–1110. https://doi.org/10.1139/f80-143

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