

Book Review

By Alan Richards

Birds of Washington State

Written By Brian H. Bell & Gregory Kennedy, Lone Pine Publishing International Inc., 2006

It's easy to use; it's informative; it's concise; and it is attractively & accurately illustrated. What more do you want? This book provides a very useful service: it leaves out the many species of birds usually found outside the state of Washington. When you are in our area, looking at a thrush, or a flycatcher, or a shorebird, it is very likely to be in this book. You will probably not have to look further. If it is really not in this book, you might want to get out your camera and maybe your cell phone. But that is another story.

I used this book in the field, on a recent trip to Malheur NWR, in southeastern Oregon, a place to which Ann & I had for 25 years dreamt of going.

Looking up a bird in the book proved easy: not only is it in the familiar taxonomic order, it is cleverly grouped by color tabs dividing the book into taxonomic groups, e.g., waterfowl, falcons, shorebirds & allies, woodpeckers, flycatchers, and so forth. If you are wondering, "What is the taxonomic sequence?", this book explains that, too: "Based on DNA and other evidence, ornithologists arrange all of the [families of birds] in a standard sequence, beginning with species most similar to the evolutionary ancestors of birds and ending with those most strongly modified by evolutionary change." Of course, there are the usual indexes listing each individual species, but there is also a handy 'quick guide' on the back cover, indicating tab color and page number of each bird group. In addition, there is a Reference Guide in the front of the book, showing a small illustration of each species (a thumbnail sketch), again in taxonomic order.

This book will give you a good basis for birding in Washington. The Introduction to this book is valuable not only for summarizing many ways to distinguish bird families and species from one another, it also lists many places to go to find these birds. Maps and descriptions of "Washington's Top 15 Birding Areas" plus a list of the "Top 50 Birding Sites" will certainly be enough to get anyone started. As the authors also mention, there are hundreds, even thousands, of good places to look at birds in Washington.

The Introduction notes that 320 species of birds are regularly found in the State. There is a section covering 33 additional 'occasional' species, and a checklist of the 470+ species on the Washington Ornithological Society's website. More species are added to the state list each year; for some of these, you will need to consult a field guide for birds usually found on some other part of our continent, or perhaps on the other side of the ocean. But that, too, is another story. . . .

Protecting the Northern Spotted Owl

The Northern Spotted Owl has declined in number 40-60% in the last ten years, and over half of all "owl circles" on state lands have been de-certified. The Forestry Practices Board has proposed changes to two WACS to slow down the harvest of old growth and other timber near and in owl habitat and the decertification of owl circles. Margaret Green and Charlotte Persons testified at a Kelso public hearing on these WACS on May 15. Margaret said that she supported the proposed changes. Charlotte said that the proposed changes do not go far enough in protecting the owl's habitat. She asked for a moratorium on all harvest until Federal and State recovery plans are developed and implemented, a permanent moratorium on spotted owl circle decertification, not just until the recovery plans are established in June 2007, and long-term plans, timelines, staffing, and funding plans to revise upland wildlife rules.

Auduboners have been involved in two other efforts to save the owls. In March Audubon WA helped negotiate an agreement with the Board of Natural Resources designed to protect older forest on state lands needed by spotted owls and other species. On April 18, Kittitas Audubon Society and Seattle Audubon Society filed intent to sue Weyerhaeuser Co. and Washington State for allowing harvest of forest near five owl nesting sites. While Weyerhaeuser claims that it goes beyond state regulations to protect the owls, environmentalists says that extensive harvest of big tracts of forest near nesting sites is harmful to the birds. For more information, see the web sites of Audubon Washington, Department of Natural Resources, and Seattle Post-Intelligencer.