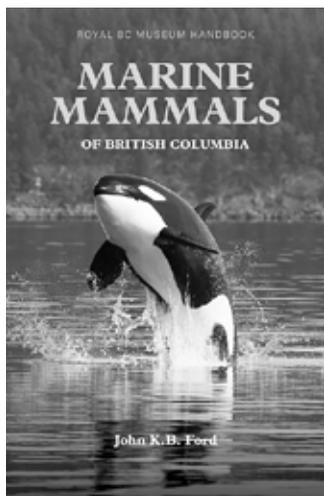


## BOOK REVIEWS

Compiled and Reviewed by Chris Siddle

***Marine Mammals of British Columbia*** – Royal B.C. Museum Handbook – The Mammals of British Columbia: Volume 6 by John K.B. Ford. 2014. Royal BC Museum, 675 Bellevue Street, Victoria, BC. V8W 9W2. 14 X 21 cm. 460 pages. 102 colour photographs plus 31 colour illustrations, skull drawings, distribution maps, glossary, and selected references. Soft cover. \$27.95 Can.



This is the sixth and final volume of The Royal BC Museum's Handbook of the Mammals of British Columbia, which replaces Ian McTaggart-Cowan and Charles Guiguet's classic work by the same name. In many ways *Marine Mammals of British Columbia* is the finest volume of the series. Attractively designed, well-illustrated, and written in a very readable style, it is packed with information about the 10 whales, four beaked whales, 11 dolphins and porpoises, the Northern Fur Seal, two sea lions, the Northern Sea Elephant, Harbour Seal, and Sea Otter found in British Columbia's marine waters.

Each species account contains common and scientific names, other common names, descriptions, measurements, identification, distribution, habitat, feeding ecology, behaviour and social organization, life

history, including population dynamics, exploitation, taxonomy, population structure, conservation and status, remarks, and selected references. Text is accompanied by an attractive and realistic field guide-style painting of the species, often including figures of the adult (both male and female if the species is sexually dimorphic) and the neonate, skull diagrams, a full page colour map of the species' distribution in B.C. waters, and one-to-three colour photographs usually of the species in the wild. The photographs highlight occurrences for rare species (for example, a Long-beaked Common Dolphin leaping above False Creek in September, 2002) or typical behaviour for more regularly occurring species (for example, the "tea-pot" pose of a Northern Fur Seal resting on the ocean).

The 29-page introduction focuses on the biology of the diverse group that includes filter feeding baleen whales, carnivorous orcas of several types through the canine-like sea lions to that appealing member of the weasel family, the sea otter. It includes up-to-date information about sensory systems and sound production, feeding, distribution, migration, reproduction, and behaviour and social systems. This is followed by a chapter that focuses on British Columbia's marine environment with helpful maps of key coastal locations, and a summary of the history of whaling and marine mammal study that are worth the purchase price of the volume alone.

One way or another British Columbia has often found itself at the centre of controversy regarding its marine mammals, whether it was home to whaling or hunting grounds or for capturing orcas for aquaria. The province is, after all, the birthplace of Greenpeace and the international save-the-whales movement. British Columbia has also had a relatively long history of marine mammal research. The importance of marine mammals to native culture has long been noted. Now, at last, the province has an attractive, complete, up-to-date, and relatively inexpensive account of its whales and seals and their places in the post-modern world. Highly recommended for all British Columbians and others interested in marine mammals.

***Peterson Reference Guide to Birding by Impression: A Different Approach to Knowing and Identifying Birds*** by Kevin T. Karlson and Dale Rosselet. 2015. Harcourt Publishing Co., 215 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003. 18.5 X 26 cms. 286 pages, hundreds of colour photos. Hard cover. Approx. \$34.95 Can.

This bird guide emerges as a variation on the holistic Cape May school of bird identification which has been trying to emerge as a major player in the world of bird identification for the past 30 years. Championed by Peter Dunne, Michael O'Brien, and their friends, this approach toward the "whole" bird, or "birding by impression" (BBI in this volume) is a merchandising approach designed to capture the lucrative bird guide market. So far it has failed to take the birding world by storm. However, despite the publishers' hoopla, *Birding by Impression* and books like it can be helpful complements to standard identification practices. As for learning a bird's "impression", its shape and behaviour so well that you can identify the species without seeing its plumage colours and markings, nothing replaces field experience. The more time you spend watching birds, the better birder you will be. There's no short cut for experience, no matter to what birding "school" you belong.

Harrumphing done with, I find that *Birding by Impression* as a supplementary text is full of familiar identification information as well as written impressions that the birder may have sensed at a preverbal level but has had trouble expressing himself. The book is good for groups like swans, shorebirds, terns, hummingbirds, and swifts, but weak with flycatchers and warblers, except at a genus level. In general there's little new here and many standard field guides cover similar species equally well. Similar species are pictured next to each other (Yellow Rail and immature Sora; Vaux's and Chimney swifts; Couch's and Tropical kingbirds, etc.) and many of the colour photos of species that can be confused for each other are arranged as 102 photo quizzes (with the answers given at the back of the books), which are the best part of the book. The usual problems that photograph guides have with images' variable tones have been minimized by what must have been an exhaustive photo search. Unfortunately, and

shockingly in this world of competing publications, the editors have not kept up with taxonomic changes from 2009 onwards so the book is already six years out of date even though it was published in 2015, omitting to deal with, for instance, the splitting of Winter and Pacific wrens, the new taxonomic order for bird families, and the new Latin names for many New World warblers. I give *Peterson Reference Guide to Birding by Impression...* a conditional recommendation.

***Bears in the Backyard: Big Animals, Sprawling Suburbs, and the New Urban Jungle*** by Edward R. Ricciuti. 2014. The Countryman Press, Woodstock, Vermont. www.countrymanpress.com. 16 x 23.5 cms. 23 uncaptioned black-and-white photos. 248 pages. Hard cover. \$26.95 Can.

In spite of the specific main title, this book is also about cougars, coyotes, deer, moose, alligators, pythons, and venomous snakes, as well as Black Bears, and how these species are spreading into the "new urban jungle", suburbia where most human residents are ill-prepared to host them. Each chapter begins with an account of the rise of the "problem" wildlife whether it be a native species like the White-tailed Deer or an exotic like the African Rock Python and how the creatures are adapting to North American suburbia. This is usually followed by examples of creature-human conflict taken from the media, followed by a brief discussion of possible solutions and ending with a list of things to do and not to do when a person is caught in a confrontation with an alligator, coyote, etc.

Edward Ricciuti has been a magazine journalist most of his life and his approach comes across as slightly sensationalistic. As so many Americans do, Ricciuti uses the all-too-familiar trope of fear of invasion of one's property as a prime motivating theme and, yes, as an admitted fan of armed force posits firepower as an occasional solution to a few of the new wildlife problems about which suburbanites are apprehensive. However, to be fair, *Bears in the Backyard...* is generally a fairly accurate primer about problem wildlife, and the reader could do worse than to read this book. Best borrowed from a library if you are interested in a quick review of human/wildlife problems in suburbia.