

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

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Field Guide to Bird Nests and Eggs of Alaska's Coastal Tundra by Timothy D. Bowman. [2004]. 80 pages. 5.5 x 8.5 inches. 450 colour photographs. University of Alaska Fairbanks, P.O. Box 755040, 205 O'Neill Building, Fairbanks, AK 99775-5040. (Softcover: US \$25.00). *Reviewed by R. Wayne Campbell.*

There are not many books available that deal specifically with the nest and eggs of birds, so any are welcome. This attractive, full-colour volume was prepared to help biologists and others conducting biological research on the coastal tundra of Alaska. It has been designed for use in the field with waterproof pages and a ring binding for easy folding.

Seventy-one species of tundra-nesting birds are included. Each compact account has coloured photographs of the species (different sexes where applicable), two to four of the nests, and a sample of a single egg at life size accompanied by measurements. For some species (e.g., Canvasback) a spread museum wing is included to show wing pattern along with samples of contour feathers from the breast.

The text is brief. A few statements on quick identification of the species as it is flushed, the location and description of its nest and eggs, and some natural history notes round off the maximum 70 or so words of text on each page. The species' relative abundance in coastal Alaska is listed and finally the average clutch size and typical egg measurements are included with actual size images of an egg.

As many photographers know, obtaining good photos of the nest and eggs of birds is a real challenge. For the most part, images in the book are good. For some deep nests, however, it would have helped if a light reflector was used to highlight the eggs.

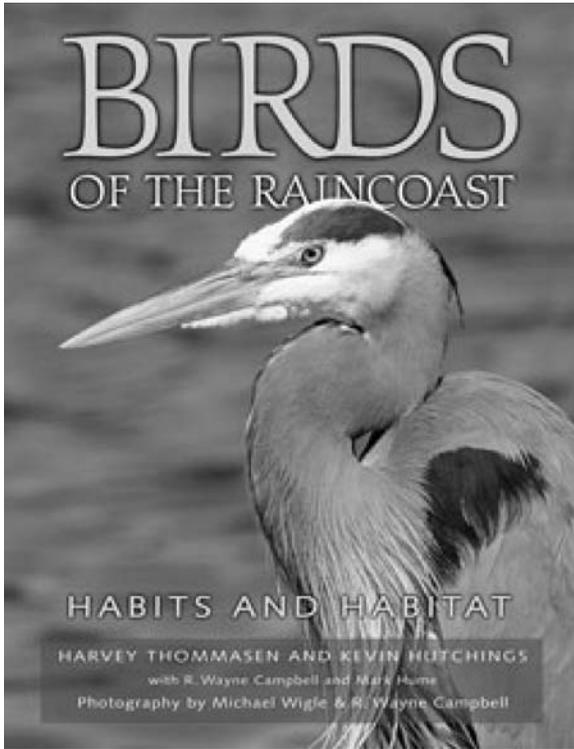
Unless you are visiting the tundra of coastal Alaska the book has limited use in British Columbia since only 30 of the species breed in our province. I personally found the photographs on contour feathers to be quite helpful since many nests can be positively identified if the female is absent. Because I am an old egg collector I purchased the book for nostalgic reasons alone.

Birds of the Raincoast: Habits and Habitat by Harvey Thommasen and Kevin Hutchings with R. Wayne Campbell and Mark Hume. [2004]. 222 pages. 8.5 x 11 inches. Harbour Publishing. \$44.95 (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Birds of the Raincoast is a well written text that covers the birds of British Columbia's coast east to the Coast Mountains, from estuaries, rivers, fields, farmlands, towns, old-growth and second-growth forests, to the subalpine and the alpine zones. Each of the nine chapters covers one broad habitat, with two other chapters addressing the birds of winter and the birds of the night. The text examines the major (most noticeable) species attracted to each habitat; for example, the chapter entitled *River Birds* features Common Merganser, Belted Kingfisher, American Dipper, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Vaux's Swift, Black Swift, and Bald Eagle. Each "key" species has its most common plumages described, and a brief life history given, with emphasis upon observable features like feeding and nesting. Common vocalizations are described phonetically. Frequently if a major writer such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge or John Claire has captured some aspect of a bird in verse, a brief quotation will be given. Quoted writers include well-known members of Great Britain's literary tradition, as well as Canadian and American authors like T.G. Roberts, John Burroughs, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Canadian folk names for birds are sometimes given, especially when the names capture some characteristic of the bird that the public might notice.

Strategically placed throughout the text are 23 sidebars called "Campbell Facts". In general these mini-essays by Wayne Campbell stress not trivia but general ornithological truths. Subjects include the re-use of nests, which member of a pair of adults incubate eggs, average lengths of incubation "shifts", collective nouns for bird flocks, territory sizes, and life expectancy of the Pileated Woodpecker or winter energetics of the Dark-eyed Junco, etc., expanding upon points raised in the main text.

The text is particularly well written and reads very easily. The content seems generally accurate though a few errors were noted. The Rufous Hummingbird is not the smallest bird in North America (p. 110); the Calliope Hummingbird is several mm smaller. Of the Pileated Woodpecker, it is stated that "*an adult can consume up to 2,500 carpenter ants at a single feeding*" (p.120). I checked several standard publications on woodpeckers and found the probable source of this "fact" was Bent (1939) who cites a study by F.E.L. Beal (1911) that found "as many as 2,600 ants ... in a single stomach." (p. 183 in 1964 reprint). Ants in a stomach are just not the same as carpenter ants consumed at a single feeding. The Hairy Woodpecker's bill is black, not yellowish as stated on page 120. A gull identified as a Herring Gull eating a starfish (p.32) looks more like a Glaucous-winged x Western hybrid to me. Finally, though not an error so much as a misleading omission, the Brown Creeper shown at the nest (p. 115) should be labeled as a fledgling.



wish that I had *Birds of the Raincoast* back in the early 1960s when I was becoming interested in the birds around my home in Mission; it would have answered many a question I had as a beginner. *Birds of the Raincoast* has almost everything a person noticing birds for the first time would wonder about, whether it concerns identification, behaviour, feeding, nesting or singing. Highly recommended.

Editor's Note: *Birds of the Raincoast* won the prestigious British Columbia Bookseller's Choice Award at the province's annual awards banquet in Vancouver on 23 April 2005. The book was judged the best work published in British Columbia in 2004 based on public appeal, initiative, design, production and content. Congratulations!

We are also grateful to Harbour Publishing for allowing the Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies to announce their vision in the book in a page entitled *Proactive Conservation in British Columbia: The Wildlife Data Centre*.

Photographs of over 100 species of birds grace the pages of this well printed book. Most pages contain one or two crisply reproduced photos. There are also photos of nests, nestlings, habitats, wildflowers and wild berries, as well as photos of about 10 species of wild mammals throughout the book. Almost all of the bird photos are outstanding, so much so that I think this volume is one of the most powerful collections of photographs of British Columbian birds. The vast majority of photos were taken by R. Wayne Campbell and Michael Wigle. Campbell just gets better as a bird photographer with each new publication. Check out his photos of the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch anting (p.194) or the adult Northern Goshawk tending two chicks at a large messy stick nest (p.117). I was unfamiliar with Wigle's work but I am now a fan. He is a master of light and colour, using both to evoke mood. My favourite images by Wigle include the American Robin surrounded by fall leaves (p.66), the Common Raven (p.57), and the male Red-winged Blackbird singing in a swamp (p.138). Other contributing photographers include Tim Zurowski, Michael Preston, Mark Nyhof, and Donald E. Waite.

Even with its occasional shortcomings, I can't think of a better book for the beginning bird watcher in coastal BC. I