

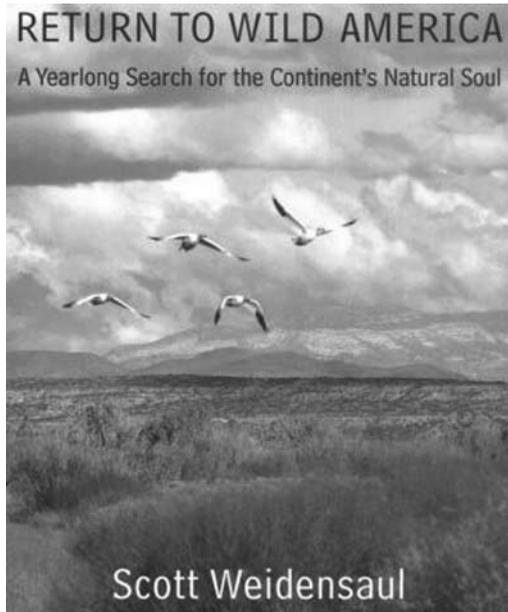
PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

Compiled and edited by Chris Siddle

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Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent's Natural Soul by Scott Weidensaul. [2005]. 394 pages. 9 x 6 inches. North Point Press, New York. \$36.50 Can. (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

In 1953 Roger Tory Peterson showed his English friend and fellow ornithologist, James Fisher, wild America. They began in early spring at a seabird colony at Cape St. Mary's in Newfoundland and followed the coast to the Rio Grande, dipped down to Mexico's Sierra Madre to sample tropical birds, and returned to Texas. After a few days in the "sky mountains" of southeast Arizona, they turned north and west for the final leg of their journey which involved coastal California, Washington, and north-



coastal Alaska. In 100 days they traveled 50,000 kilometres. Illustrated with charming sketches by Peterson, *Wild America* became a best seller among naturalists when it was published in 1955, and is still read today. Some of the places Peterson and Fisher visited, like the Dry Tortugas, are still meccas for the birding brother and sisterhood, many of whom first heard about such places in Peterson's book. In *Return to Wild America*, Scott Weidensaul re-traces Peterson and Fisher's journey, but not for birding. He uses their journey as a route that will guide him to understand environmental changes occurring in wild America 50 years later.

Weidensaul has written over two dozen books, most of them about the environment. Among his recent publications is *Living on the Wind*, an account of North American bird migration short listed for the 1999 Pulitzer Prize. He knows the right people to talk to about wild America: biologists, conservationists, and land managers, and he communicates his findings in clear and gripping prose. *Return to Wild America* is an important book for the naturalist who wants a clear picture of the complex situations facing our parks, reserves, national forests, even cities, as well as other wild places. Highly recommended.

Amphibians and Reptiles of British Columbia by Brent M. Matsuda, David M. Green, and Patrick T. Gregory. [2006]. 266 pages. 5.5 x 8.5 inches. Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, British Columbia. \$25.95 Can. (softcover). *Reviewed by Michael I. Preston*

This version of *Reptiles and Amphibians of British Columbia* is an update to the two volume set, *Reptiles of British Columbia* (P. Gregory and R.W. Campbell) and *Amphibians of British Columbia* (D.M. Green and R.W. Campbell) published in 1984. It is intended to provide new information that has emerged since the earlier works, and compliments many of the newer Museum Handbooks that have recently been published (e.g., *Rodents and Lagomorphs of British Columbia* by D. Nagorsen, *Opossums, Shrews and Moles* by D. Nagorsen, and *Bats of British Columbia* by D. Nagorsen and R.M. Brigham).

Aside from a short preface justifying the need to update the previous volumes, the book is divided into three broad categories: Introduction – includes taxonomy, biology, and conservation; Species Accounts – detailed information for each species including description, habits, breeding, and distribution and range; and Supplementary Information – appendix, glossary, bibliography, acknowledgements, and index.

Much of the introductory information is similar to that provided in the earlier volumes, and new information is difficult to glean from the text because references are absent in the text body. The most obvious addition to the introduction is a short section on the conservation status and protection of reptiles and amphibians. I was somewhat disappointed by the length (4 pages) and treatment (17 references) of this important topic, and would have preferred to see more detail pertaining to factors affecting reptile and amphibian decline. A few simple figures and tables would help elucidate some of the problems that many species face. It would also have been helpful if the authors had identified some ways in which people could improve habitats for reptiles and amphibians in cities, given that nature-scaping is becoming more commonplace in urban and suburban gardens.

Within the species accounts, much of the introductory information previously presented at the level of Order (e.g., Salamanders, Frogs and Toads)

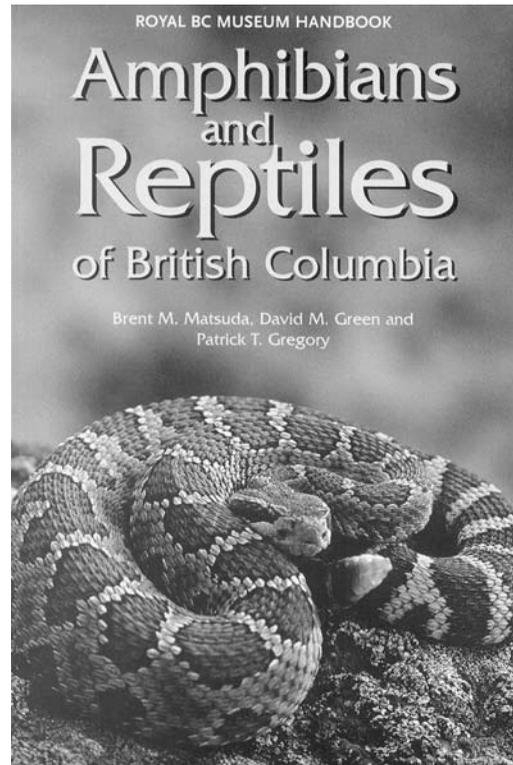
has been moved to the Introduction (*e.g.*, *Breeding in Salamanders, Voice and Social Behaviour in Frogs*) in this handbook. Within the species accounts, the text for each Order is updated, and generally provides a good description of the characteristics that define the families, genera, and species within an Order. Line drawings for each of the major taxonomic groups helps illustrate various parts of the anatomy, and a descriptive key is provided to aid in the identification of British Columbia species.

The species accounts themselves are largely unchanged from the earlier volumes except that they provide some new information on distribution and range. For example, since the previous volume, the tailed-frog has been divided into two separate species: coast tailed-frog and Rocky Mountain tailed-frog. Of the former, the distribution is now known to be widespread from the south coast, north to the central mainland coast, and mainly west of the Cascades, whereas previously it was known only from the southern mainland coast. Species such as the introduced bullfrog appear to have changed little in their distribution, but this may be an artifact of either the scale at which observations are recorded, or on the frequency of reporting of new occurrences. One particular item that I found puzzling about the maps was that some observations that appear in the 1984 volumes have disappeared in this version. The authors do not state why this occurs, so one can only speculate that the earlier observation was either reviewed with new evidence and subsequently deemed invalid, or that the observation was accidentally omitted from the new maps.

A nice addition to the handbook is the colour plates that help aid in species identification. All regularly occurring species are shown, whereas those that are much rarer are not (*e.g.*, leatherback turtle). My only concern about the photographs is that several of the images appear blurred, and some appear to have a yellowish-cast that makes colour representation inaccurate. Larger images also would have helped when trying to view small or discrete features.

The book concludes with a brief appendix of useful contacts in Canada and in British Columbia, a glossary, a bibliography and list of cited references, acknowledgements, and an index. The authors appear to make good use of newly published information as

evidenced by 72% of the cited references occurring after the publication of the previous volumes. However, several publications produced by the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program appear to have been overlooked, despite being readily available on-line. Within the Contact Information section, the authors make a rather strange plea for information. On page 233 the authors state that “*Hoarding information does nothing to enhance management decisions directed toward the animals and their habitats. If you know of individuals or organizations holding information that would be useful to monitoring common or rare species, please encourage them to share it with those who deal with conservation and management. This information can be sent to the B.C. Ministry of Environment’s Conservation Data Centre or B.C. Frogwatch, or to Brent Matsuda...*”. Statements like these seem boldly out of place for a reference guide and sound more politically charged than they should be. It’s



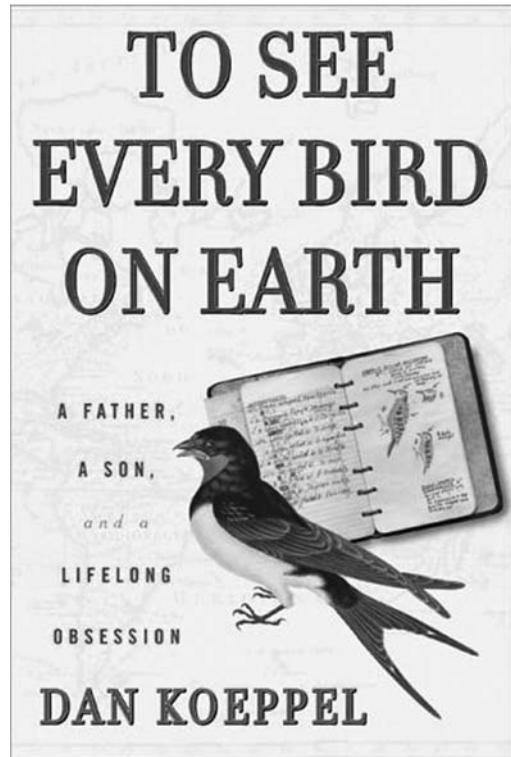
one thing to encourage the submission of sightings, but this sends out an altogether different message. A better approach might have been to give examples of the kinds of data that people can contribute, or to list some current projects for which specific data are needed.

The book is generally well-written, although I found some statements a bit awkward or misleading. For example, on page 14, the authors note that “frogs always close their eyes as they leap”. I think what the authors mean is that frogs leap with the nictitating membrane closed (a transparent eyelid). This leads to a second problem, in that no mention of the nictitating membrane can be found in the text, index, or glossary, despite its importance to several species for underwater navigation, eye-cleaning, and protection during hibernation. In the Conservation Status and Protection section on page 50 the authors mention that most snakes are loathed by humans and write, “... our only seriously venomous snake species is responsible for almost no deaths in British Columbia”. This leaves the reader wondering what “almost no deaths” means, and what circumstances lead to the attack. On page 62 readers are informed that they can contribute to the understanding of amphibians and reptiles in British Columbia simply by having enthusiasm and a good identification book (such as theirs), but on the same page they note that professional ability is required to identify some species. Such a statement may prove discouraging to anyone thinking about trying to identify amphibians and reptiles.

Overall, the book will be useful for people wanting more information about amphibians and reptiles in British Columbia than is typically afforded by a standard field guide. The book is largely a repeat of the two earlier volumes, although there appears to be a considerable amount of new information on distribution and range sections for each species. As a guide for identification, I think amateurs will appreciate a more user-friendly field guide than this book provides, whereas graduate students and practitioners will find the artificial key and text descriptions more useful. For the inquisitive mind, the book certainly stimulates the reader to seek out more information, especially in the areas of habitat use, threats and vulnerabilities, and conservation and mitigation options. Recommended.

To See Every Bird on Earth: A Father, a Son, and a Lifelong Obsession by Dan Koepfel [2005]. 288 pages. 9 x 6 inches. Hudson Street Press, \$35.00 Can. (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Recently two authors have published books about birders. Mark Cocker’s *Birders: Tales of a Tribe* is an account of the author’s youth as a twitcher. Mark Obmascik’s *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession* is the saga of three Americans competing for the best North American year list. Cocker is a birder and articulates some of what some birders feel as they pursue birds in their backyards, around the country and across the world. Obmascik is a sports writer, giving his readers an outsider’s view of the price each of his subject birder pays in his quest for the unofficial title. To these two books may be added Dan Koepfel’s *To See Every Bird on Earth*. Dan is a writer, slightly interested in birds, but more importantly, the son of a world bird lister.



His father, Richard Koepfel, has enough time and money to pursue birds virtually everywhere, building a huge world list. About a quarter of Dan's book is about world listing and its practitioners, like the late Phoebe Snetsinger, birding full tilt under the awful weight of her doctors' prediction that she has only months to live, and Paul Kastner, a career diplomat who asks for remote diplomatic posts, lives in a nation for a year or two, sees as many of its birds as possible and moves on, having planned his life very far in advance. Each wants to see as many of the planet's 10,000 bird species as possible. Mrs. Snetsinger reached 84% before being killed in a traffic accident in Madagascar.

Sons try to understand their fathers. In *To See Every Bird on Earth* writer/son Dan lays out the story of his father whose parents were committed to Zionism and had little time for his childhood dream of being an ornithologist. In a series of compromises that do not work out, Richard Koepfel finds a wife, becomes a doctor to keep his mother and father happy, loses the wife, and seems a distracted stranger to his two sons. He works as an emergency room physician and arranges his blocks of days off so that he can take bird tours. He becomes a world lister while oldest son Dan becomes a deeply unhappy and lost young man hoping for guidance, support and, above everything else, a demonstration of love from his father. In the final pages of the book, Dan and Richard search for Richard's 7000th bird, and Dan reveals what he has learned about his father.

To See Every Bird on Earth is not a listing odyssey. It examines family dysfunction and a very shaky father-son relationship. However, against this often uncomfortable background is a son's deep affection for his father, respect for his father's interest in birds, and a desire to share with the rest of the world his father's passionate listing obsession. Recommended for all birders and especially for people who have to live with them or are related closely to them. Recommended.

Butterflies and Butterfly Gardening in the Pacific Northwest by Mary Kate Woodward [2005]. 104 pages. 9 x 6 inches. Whitecap Books, North Vancouver, BC. \$19.95 Can. (softcover). *Reviewed by Ben van Drimmelen.*

This short, informative book applies the theme of "if you build it, they will come". The emphasis in the text is on the gardening; the emphasis of the photos is on the butterflies. The book describes how to meet some basic butterfly needs and wants, such as food plants, moist areas and warm walls for basking in the sun. It adds some basic prohibitions – no pesticides and no herbicides, ever; suppress your neat-freak tendencies and let the litter lie. And from there, it is simple. All you need to do is place your flowering plants in clumps, add a few locally-scrunged caterpillars, become a friend of weeds and enjoy a summer of lazing about watching who comes flitting by. The second half of the book provides an identification gallery of butterflies and moths that are indigenous to pretty much all of British Columbia; coast and interior, north and south. It ends with a few useful tables of trees, shrubs, vines and herbs and the caterpillars and adult butterflies that use them. Recommended.

Bears: A Year in the Life by Matthias Breiter. [2005]. 176 pages. 9 x 11 inches. 138 colour photographs. Firefly Books, Ontario. \$34.95 Can. (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

At first glance *Bears: A Year in the Life* appears to be a picture book, but it's far more than that. Although it contains dozens of outstanding photos of bears, its real value is found in its text. *Bears...* is a well written, very readable introduction to the lives of American Black Bears, Polar Bears and Brown Bears (including the Grizzly). Concise notes on the other five bear species of the world follow the main text.

Breiter is a wildlife photographer (95% of the book's photos are his) and a zoologist completing his doctorate on bears. His enthusiasm and respect for bears is evident throughout the text. Organized by months, each chapter containing a special topic like hibernation or diet, Breiter's text is not only informative but also fascinating. It's the kind of read

where the reader feels compelled to share tidbits of information with anyone within earshot: the average weight of a male Black Bear is 400 pounds but one hit by a car near Winnipeg weighed 900 pounds; young male bears are forcefully ejected from their mothers' home ranges and are the age group most likely to wander and to get into trouble with humans as they search for their place in the world... and on and on.

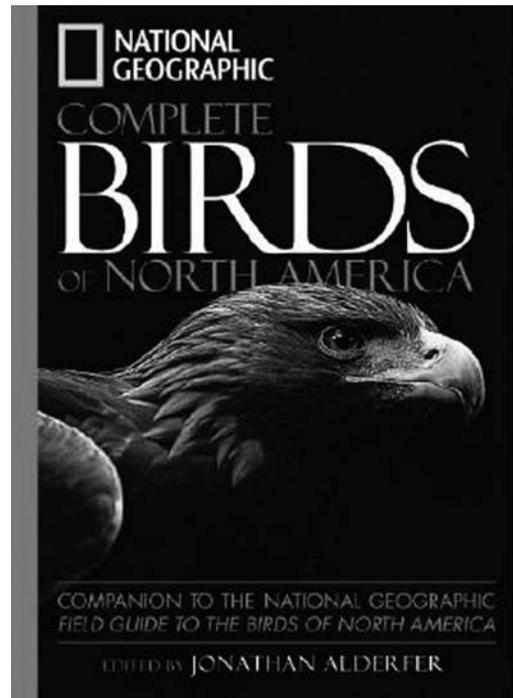
The book is not perfect. Each chapter begins with a description of individual bears in the wild. These vignettes are less successful than the rest of the text due to Breiter's fondness for clichés: creeks rush to greet the ocean, a nip is in the fall air, summer days are endless, etc. However, when Breiter leaves description for exposition his prose becomes leaner and much more readable. Important aspects of bear biology are concisely explained, like diet, hibernation, den microclimate, cannibalism, infanticide, bear prehistory, mating, navigation, colour morphs, and conservation. This information plus the many dramatic photos of bears feeding, fighting, playing, and following Mom (or just being bears) makes *Bears: A Year in the Life* a well produced must-have addition to the naturalist's library as well as a good bargain at a modest price. Highly recommended.

Complete Birds of North America. Jonathan Alderfer (editor). [2006]. 663 pages. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C. \$48.00 Can. (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Complete Birds of North America is a hardcover with 663 pages and is not to be confused with National Geographic's popular softcover *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (4th edition, 2002) field guide. (A revision of the *Field Guide*, 5th edition was released in November 2006). Rather, *Complete Birds of North America* is a "companion" to the field guide and is intended for the shelf or the car seat, not the pocket.

The illustrations are mostly those that appeared in the 4th (last) edition of the *Field Guide*. The plates were broken up so that each species' account has the relevant paintings included within it. The plumage descriptions are 2-4 times longer than those of the *Field Guide*. Since these descriptions are in full sentences rather than fragments, it does

not necessarily mean that there is 2-4 times the information. Each species' account also includes a revised distribution map, 'a la' the *Field Guide*. Similar species, voice, status and distribution, and sometimes "population" are included. Dangers and limiting factors to populations are also listed. Biological information like nesting and feeding is not included except briefly in family introductions.



A colour photograph introduces each family. Occasionally, but not frequently enough, photos are used to illustrate tricky identification problems like Hoary versus Common redpoll (pp. 636-37). I find most photos in *Complete Birds* too small and too few to be of great help, but that's a subjective opinion. Subspecies are dealt to varying degrees of detail in prose if they are field-recognizable.

A good feature is the inclusion of paintings of every species accidental to North America. Only one plumage per accidental species is shown however.

A disadvantage to *Complete Guide* is the absence

of plates that allow a person to see similar species side by side. For example, since the wren plate was broken up so that each species appears next to its prose account, comparing the image of one wren with another would entail lots of flipping back and forth through the accounts. Or you could just turn to the wren plate in your trusty *National Geographic Field Guide*.

The question has been asked, "How does this volume compare to Sibley?" I presume the inquirer means Sibley's big field guide, not the little Western and Eastern volumes that leave out too much information. If you're a Sibley convert, nothing currently in print can take the place of Sibley's big field guide. Sibley also contains many subspecies and recognizable forms. In fact, if you were trying to learn, say, the differences between the eastern and western forms of the Warbling Vireo, Sibley does a much more detailed explanation than the National Geographic companion does. Generally, however, I would say that the "companion" is just that, a companion volume that you'll consult after Sibley and after the *National Geographic Field Guide*. Is the "companion" worth the \$48.00 (Can.) price tag? Yes. It's up-to-date and contains a huge amount of information, some of it synthesized from the last 20 years of field identification journals. Recommended.