

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

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Crows: Encounters with the Wise Guys by Candace Savage. (Figure 12) 2005. 113 pages. 18 x 23 cm. Colour, black and white photographs and sketches. Index. Bibliography. Greystone Publishing, 2323 Quebec Street, Suite 201, Vancouver, BC V5T 4S7. \$27.00 (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Saskatoon writer Candace Savage is fascinated by crows. Her study of the intelligence of crows, ravens, magpies, and jays, *Bird Brain*, was well received when it was published in 1995. Now she has followed up with a slim but entertaining summary of recent discoveries in corvid research. She is thorough but never boring in her explanations of crow and raven intelligence as the subject is being revealed by scientists like Gavin Hunt who discovered that the New Caledonia Crow fashions twigs into hooks, rasps and brushes to skewer insects hidden deep in cracks and crevices. Although widespread (only South America and Antarctic are devoid of crows and ravens), crows are remarkably difficult to study, especially at the nest. Crow scientists run peculiar risks. Consider the fate of Cornell crow researcher Kevin McGowan who gained such an evil “reputation” among the area’s crows by banding their chicks in their nests that they would instantly pick him out from a crowd to harass him with noisy mobbing. Imagine trying to walk down the suburban streets trailing a cloud of 75 outraged crows!

Crows is an attractive volume with sketches reprinted from the works of Ernest Thompson Seton, Tony Angell, and Arthur Rackham among others. The prominence of crows and ravens throughout human societies and history is amply explored through the inclusion of several myths ranging from Apollo’s white raven of Ancient Greece to the Brother Grimm’s bizarre tale of seven ravens.

Crows: Encounters with the Wise Guys is an entertaining and well researched introduction to corvid intelligence and sociability. Highly recommended.

Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion: A Comprehensive Resource for Identifying North American Birds by Peter Dunne (Figure 13) 2006. 710 pages. 23.5 x 18 x 4 cm.. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Mass. \$37.95 Can. (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

This field guide “companion” contains no plates or photographs, no illustrations at all! It doesn’t give any life-history information, but concentrates on field identification. There are sections of status, distribution, habitat, movement/ migration, behavior, flight, and vocalizations. An interesting section for each bird is its “cohabitants”, species commonly found with the bird in question during breeding season. However, the focus of the text is Dunne’s well-known verbal facility to succinctly express key features about the appearances, behaviors, and/or calls

and songs of all regularly occurring North American birds. Mostly Dunne is dead-on in his descriptions. When Dunne describes the Gray Jay as “ghostlike in its ability to appear suddenly and silently on the limb just above your head (p. 436), or when he notes that the Canada Warbler’s song “may recall [the song of] a frantic wordy Magnolia Warbler, the reader thinks, “I couldn’t have said that better myself”. (p.575). On a few occasions his comparisons don’t work, at least not for me, like when he compares a Blue-headed Vireo to a Sperm Whale. Other than both are bigheaded, I can’t say that I’ve ever noticed much similarity between the bird and the behemoth. However, in general this book contains a mountain of identification tidbits gleaned through Dunne’s careful observation of North America’s birds, “shortcuts” that will help both beginner and experienced birder cinch tricky identifications. I encourage birders to

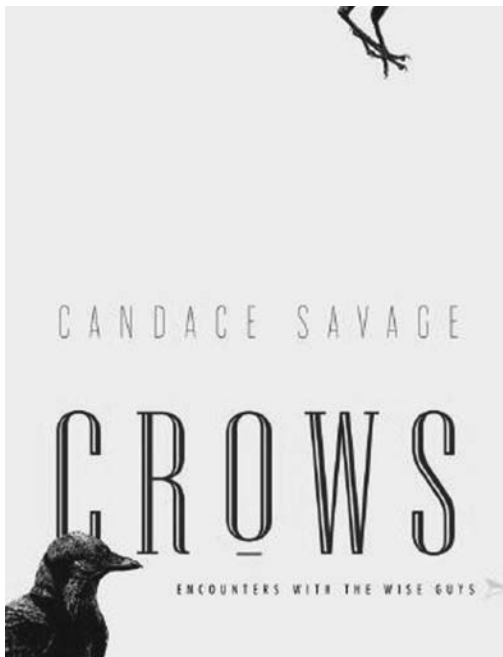


Figure 12. Book reviewer Chris Siddle says that *Crows*, by Saskatchewan writer Candace Savage, is an “entertaining summary of recent discoveries in corvid research”, and is a “well researched introduction to corvid intelligence and sociability.”

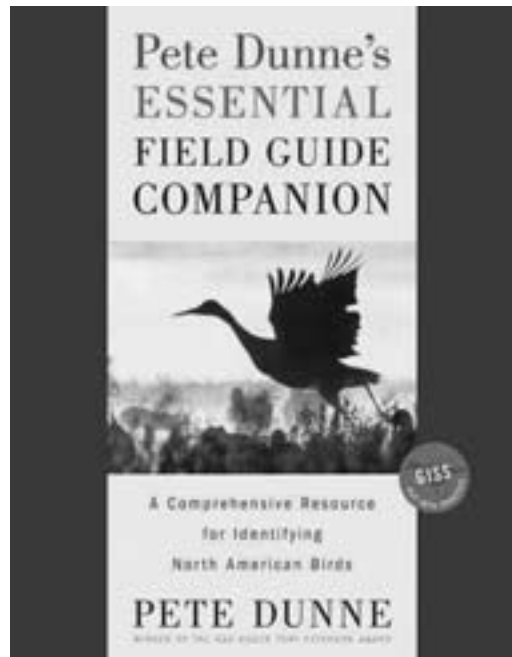


Figure 13. *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* takes bird identification to a different level, giving birders and naturalists alike a different, but valuable, perspective for identifying, and understanding, our feathered friends.

buy *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* and make a habit of browsing through it. Even when you disagree with Dunne, he makes you look at a species closer than you did before and expand your impression of that bird to include imaginative images that capture its essence. Recommended.

Birds of Southwestern British Columbia by Richard Cannings, Tom Aversa and Hal Opperman. (Figure 14) 2005. 414 pages. 11.5 x 15 cm. Heritage House. \$19.95 (softcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

When someone wants you to recommend an easy-to-use beginner's guide to bird identification in southwest BC, this is the best book for the job. It covers Greater Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, the Fraser Canyon, Manning Park, Whistler, the mid-coast to Bella Coola, Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and the Sunshine Coast. Two hundred species are described and illustrated. The elimination of species that beginner or early intermediate birders are very unlikely to encounter is particularly well done, reflecting the long experience of the authors. Excellent bonuses are two sections briefly describing and illustrating mountain specialties (Blue Grouse, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, for example) and offshore specialties (common pelagic birds) a beginner is most likely to see during special local trips.

Each species account contains point form description with key identification features in bold type. Similar species are discussed. Seasonal abundance is briefly described. "Where to find" lists spots where the bird will most frequently be found (e.g., "*for Caspian Tern look at Roberts Bank*"). Habitat, diet, behaviour, and voice are covered. The account ends with a "Did you know?" fact and two lines for recording date and location of a sighting, a handy way for the rookie to personalize the book. The index also serves as a tickable lifelist and a Quick Guide uses coloured page edges to locate distinctive bird families, like waterfowl and owls.

The authors made special efforts to select bird photos where the image is large, clear, and not made confusing by shadows or abnormal plumage. Each species has 1-3 photos printed facing the text. Some, like the Band-tailed Pigeon, require only one

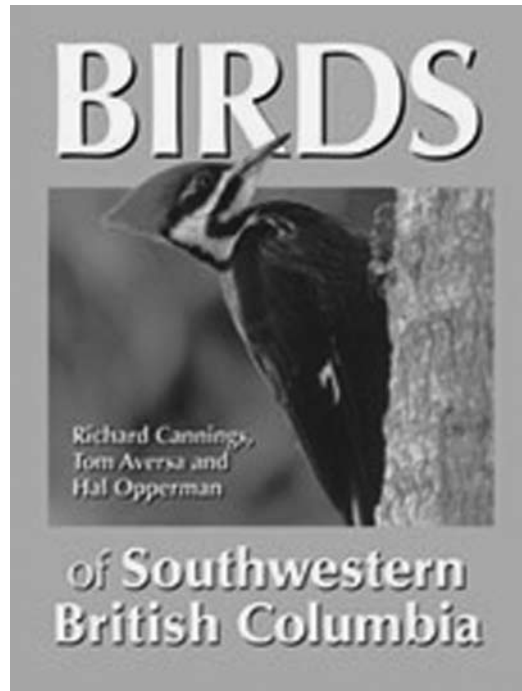


Figure 14. As a compact pocket field guide, *Birds* is a handy reference for beginner's interested in learning how to identify the most common bird species occurring in southwestern British Columbia.

image, while others, like the Western Sandpiper, get as many as 4 photos (breeding plumage, winter plumage, juvenal plumage, and an inset of a winter Semipalmated Sandpiper for comparison).

The book is sturdily bound and easy to slip into a coat pocket; however, it is meant for the hand and won't stay open on a flat surface. The introduction contains a map, 6 pages of images of the 35 most frequently encountered wild birds, figures showing the names of plumage parts, hints about binoculars and about attracting and observing birds. Also included are brief habitat descriptions, a list of prime birding locations, a short list of references, as well as information on bird clubs and helpful web sites. *Birds of Southwestern British Columbia* is a well produced, concise photographic field guide, a terrific bargain at its price. Highly recommended.