

## BOOK REVIEWS

***Kaufman Field Guide to Advanced Birding: Understanding What You See and Hear*** by Kenn Kaufman. 2011. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston and New York. Hundreds of colour photos. Black-and-white sketches. Index. 448 pages. 12 x 16.5 cm. \$24.95 Can. (vinyl bound). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*



In 1990 the first edition of “Advanced Birding” was published. It was a godsend for North American birders, describing in detail the identification of 34 species pairs or groups (e.g., Whiskered Screech-Owl versus Western Screech-Owl, Red-naped Sapsucker versus Yellow-bellied Sapsucker). Such information was not readily available during the pre-internet age. Today, connected birders have access to huge amounts of identification information online. In response to this plethora of information, Kaufman completely rewrote “Advanced Birding.” Not only is the second edition in colour, with hundreds of photos, but the author’s approach has changed dramatically. His new focus is on “how to learn to identify birds... [with the readers] truly understanding what [they] see and hear.” The second edition is meant not as a book for use in the field, but as a guide for use to improve one’s field experiences. Kaufman advises, “The best time to study [the guide] is before going out to look at birds.”

In the first seven chapters, Kaufman addresses sub-specific, age, sex, and individual differences in birds, teaching the birder to understand what is being seen. Kaufman suggests that the birder learn the common birds, consider bird shapes, develop an ability to group birds naturally, use multiple field marks, and recognize the condition of the plumage,

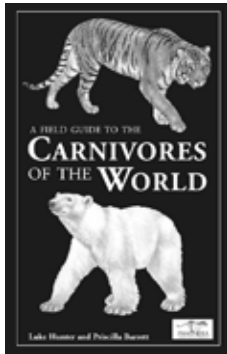
study birds in flight, and other practices. It is all sound advice. Next, he covers common pitfalls and problems with identification including the birder’s perceptions being altered by a subconscious drive to find a rarity. Chapter 3 covers terminology and bird topography, Chapter 4 introduces moult and wear, Chapter 5 focuses on behavior and size, Chapter 6 covers identification beyond the species level (variation, gender, age, morphs, hybrids, abnormal colours) and finally Chapter 7 is about techniques that help the birder learn to see, activities like visiting museum collections, and bird-banding operations to study birds closely. Other exercises include describing in writing a bird with complicated plumage, and noticing some unfamiliar thing about a common bird’s plumage. There are some very interesting activities suggested here.

From Chapter 8 onwards, the book introduces bird groups (e.g., waterfowl, seabirds, herons and egrets, diurnal raptors, shorebirds) then divides each group into closely related subsets (e.g., for waterfowl swans, geese, dabbling ducks, scoters, mergansers) and finally addresses problems and solutions in identification. With waterfowl identification, for instance, hybrids, escapees, and domesticated ducks are all significant problems. Between the bird groups are chapters addressing in detail similar and confusing species. These chapters focus on scaups, winter loons, accipiters, small hummingbirds, *Spizella* sparrows, and others.

Small but carefully cropped colour photos illustrate almost every key point in the book, with detailed captions expanding upon and illustrating terms and identification features. These captioned photos cover everything from distinguishing a “notch” from an “emargination” on a primary feather to the problems of identifying goldeneye species based upon head shapes and bill colours among females and juveniles.

If you are a birder who wants to become better at understanding birds, I assure you that the second edition of “Advanced Birding” is the single best book I can recommend highly regardless of your current level of expertise.

*Carnivores of the World* by Luke Hunter. 2011. 240 pages. 15 X 23 cm. Eighty-six colour plates by Priscilla Barrett. Princeton University Press, 41 William St., Princeton, New Jersey 08540. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. \$31.50 Can. *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*



A volume in Princeton University's handsome new Field Guide series, *Carnivores of the World* describes the appearance, distribution, habitat, feeding ecology, social and spatial behaviour, reproduction and demography, lifespan, status, and threats faced by 245 of the world's terrestrial mammals "that are united in a shared ancestry of subsisting mainly on meat." Each species account runs from about 250 to 750 words, depending upon how well the species is known. Opposite the species accounts are painted plates in colour. For widespread species major subspecies types are illustrated. Many plates also contain black-and-white sketches of significant behaviours such as Meercats (*Suricata suricatta*) mobbing a snake or the poorly known Fishing Cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) of southeast Asia catching its prey. Priscilla Barrett's plates meet the Princeton series' usual high standard for accuracy and attractiveness.

The brief introduction to the 13 carnivore families is full of fascinating information, including a brief summary of the evolutionary history of each family and general family characteristics. Following the main field guide are 86 plates featuring several skulls from each family. These are shown as sketches. Following this section is another showing footprints of 22 cat species, three hyenas,

10 mongooses, 10 civets, 16 canids, seven bears, and 35 members of the weasel family, as well as a few other tracks of less well-known species like *Fosas*. Finally, along with a one page bibliography, there is a double page glossary explaining terms like altiplano, aposematism, cathemeral, and Valdivian forest.

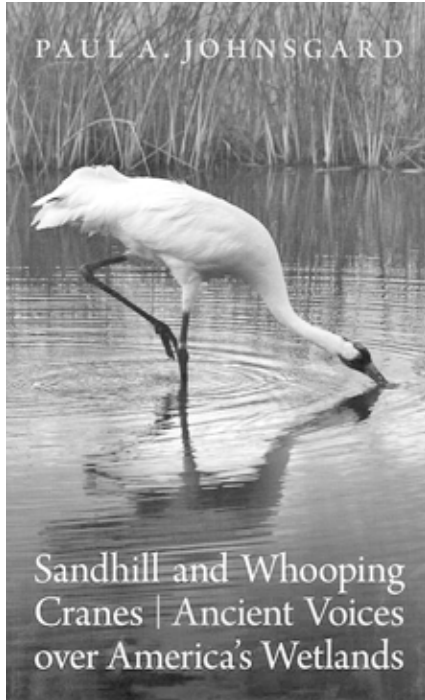
Other than the book's very small font which will challenge older readers, I find *Carnivores of the World* a very attractive and highly informative volume, and recommend it highly.

*Sandhill and Whooping Cranes: Ancient Voices over America's Wetlands* by Paul A. Johnsgard, 2011. Bison Books, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London. 19 sketches and 3 maps by the author. Appendix of crane viewing sites in the United States and Canada. References. List of suggested reading. List of online sources of information about cranes. Index. 155 pages 14 X 21.5 cm. \$14.95 Can. Soft cover. *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

At first glance *Sandhill and Whooping Cranes*... appears to be a primer of North American crane biology and conservation, but it is not. What Johnsgard has done is to put into plain language a summary of scientific research and conservation work completed on Sandhill and Whooping cranes between 1992 and 2008, bringing his books, *Cranes of the World* and *Crane Music*, up to date. Included are details of movement and timing during crane migrations recorded by a small army of crane enthusiasts; some of these details were charted with telemetry. Also described are recent developments in crane conservation as well as information about the number of Sandhill Cranes killed in legal hunting seasons.

The first chapter deals with the migrations of Lesser Sandhill Cranes, the small but longest winged of the Sandhills, which in some cases migrate in spring from Mexico over North America's plains, and across the Bering Strait far into Asia and Russian Siberia. This route can be so long that Sandhills breeding in Russia barely have time to lay eggs and raise young before they have to begin the return journey. There can be as little as a week of unclaimed time built into such a schedule!

Chapter Two examines the migratory movements of Greater and the so-called Canadian Sandhill Cranes. These groups generally have much shorter migration routes and much more time in which to complete their journeys. The good news is that several populations in the northeastern United States are re-settling historic breeding grounds where they had disappeared during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Chapter Three is devoted to Whooping Cranes and the efforts of conservationists to increase the world population, which has reached over 300 wild birds, almost all of which are dangerously concentrated in winter at Aransas Wildlife Refuge, near Corpus Christi, Texas. The initial attempt at establishing a second wild flock began in 1975 at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge. For just under a decade and a half hundreds of Whooping Crane eggs were transferred from Wood Buffalo Park in Canada to the nests of Greater Sandhill Crane foster parents. The results were largely unsuccessful: few

Whoopers fledged and none ever attempted to mate with other Whooping Cranes. The experiment was terminated in 1989. The second grand scheme was to introduce Whooping chicks born at the United States Fish and Wildlife research centre at Patuxent, Maryland, to enclosures at central Florida's Kissimmee Prairie. Predation of juveniles within their enclosures and later collisions with power lines killed many birds and in 2008 this experiment too was stopped. A small flock of Florida Whooping Cranes remains in the area but has not produced many young to date.

Finally there are the highly imaginative "Father Goose" experiments involving raising chicks that were not allowed to imprint upon their handlers, who wore crane costumes and imitated crane sounds. Once a flock of juveniles was established it was trained to follow an ultra-light aircraft which eventually led the young cranes to one of two destinations in the southeast United States for the winter. This effort, called Operation Migration, plus the Direct Autumn Release Program, have had mixed results. An eastern United States migratory flock has been established but breeding pairs have not done well at Necedah, Wisconsin, their breeding area.

The final chapter describes the "fragile futures" of North America cranes. Problems that must be addressed include the increasing legal hunting pressure against Sandhill Cranes and continued loss of wetland habitat, as well as competition (for Sandhills) for food by an exploding Snow Goose population. Global warming and the severe storms it engenders have also had negative effects. While the future looks brighter for the much more common and widespread Sandhill Crane, both Sandhills and Whooping Cranes face enormous problems in the coming years.

The book concludes with an appendix of 125 crane viewing sites by state and province, 20 pages of references, a three-page list of suggested reading, and three pages of online addresses for internet sites about cranes and the places they inhabit.

For anyone interested in cranes and concerned about their future, *Sandhill and Whooping Cranes: Ancient Voices over America's Wetlands* is a must-have text. Recommended.