

National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America – Sixth Edition

By Jon L. Dunn and Jonathan Alderfer. 2011. National Geographic Society, 777 South State Road 7, Margate, Florida 33068 USA. 574 pages. 32.00 USD.

This new edition of the familiar and popular National Geographic Guide is very similar to earlier versions. Why should it really change? It was always an excellent field guide.

This is the most significant update since the original, 25 year-old edition. Three hundred new illustrations have been inserted into the artwork. A new innovation is the inclusion of subspecies maps. The authors have included current migration information on the species maps. They have added field-mark labels to all the illustrations. This similar to the original Peterson system of little marks that point to the key feature for identification. The National Geographic Guide adds brief notes such as “distinct crest” or “white throat.”

The text and the sequence of species meet the taxonomic changes of the last few years. This means you can no longer flip the book open to a familiar spot for gulls or warblers. To offset this they have added thumb-

tabs so you can locate the key sections. Using the American Ornithologists’ Union checklist the guide contains all 960 North American species and that includes the accidental birds. As there are several depictions for each species there are 4,000 full-color illustrations by a string of bird artists. The range maps have been updated. The cover has flaps that act as a quick-reference and as book mark.

The only, very mild, disappointment was that the coverage of Red Crossbill was not extensive enough to cover all types. This species appears headed for an eight or nine way split, but only three are illustrated.

Despite the official price of \$32 we placed a bulk order for several books that worked out at \$21 each. This is an excellent price for an excellent guide – every North American birder should have one.

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