

Birdfinding in British Columbia

By Russell Cannings and Richard Cannings. 2013. Greystone Books Ltd., Suite 201, 343 Railway Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6A 1A4. 466 pages, 29.95 CAD, Paper.

I have been fortunate during my working career to visit BC on many occasions. My meetings took place at all seasons of the year. With the help of local birders I have seen some great birds in the Vancouver and Victoria areas. A couple of summer visits to other parts of BC have added to my list. I made these trips with some scraps of published information, but mostly with the guidance of BC birders.

The Cannings, particularly Richard, are legend in BC. Now Richard and Russell have come out with a bird finding guide to the whole province. They have divided the area into 11 sections. Each section is broken into several zones. So if, like me, you are attending a meeting in Victoria you can read the twenty pages of guidance for that city and surrounding area. There are a number of maps accompanied by detailed instructions to provide the visitor with the best route to follow. This is blended with information on birds likely to be seen. Based on my experience I thought the evalu-

ation the potential birds to found on any given day were realistic. Rarities are included, but they are dealt with in a rational manner (e.g. Spotted Owl – “your chances are extremely slim ...”).

I looked up Lighthouse Park, a lovely spot off Marine drive on the north shore of Vancouver. I have visited here several times hoping for a Sooty Grouse. I think the directions and the description of habitat are accurate and appropriate. The bird list includes many that I have found in that locality (but not Sooty Grouse). Over the years I have spent several, combined hours in this park listening to them call, but never seeing them. When I finally saw one at the BC-Alaska border it practically walked over my toes).

The index covers only place names and does not include birds. There is an annotated list of all the special birds (ptarmigan, grouse, tubenoses, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, alcids, owls and warblers) that mostly offsets this omission. The directions given here can be

specific. For example, for White-headed Woodpecker the authors suggest “McKinny Road between kilometres 9 and 12”. This is in addition to a full description of the site given in the main text.

The book begins with a compact discussion of the BC ecosystems – a useful summary for the visitor. There is a description of the birding year which I found most interesting. Mind you it is a bit galling (as an easterner) to read for February that “the early signs of spring Swallows search for newly hatched insects ...”. In Ottawa we are buried in snow, at temperature in the minus 20s, enjoying the “fun” of winter at Winter-

lude. It will be more than a month before the most adventurous swallow swirl around the capital.

There are a number of charming black-and-white drawings of birds. While these are cute, I would have preferred the space to be used for more maps. The maps included are very good, but not all locales have their own area diagram. Indeed there is not a map of BC itself, showing how they have divided the province into eco-regions. The only other quibble I have is I wished they had produced this book twenty years ago.

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