

Best Places to Bird in the Prairies

By John Acorn, Alan Smith, and Nicola Koper. 2018. Greystone Books. 266 pages, 24.95 CAD, Paper.

I was looking forward to reviewing this book because I am not that familiar with birding sites in Saskatchewan and Manitoba; however, I also learned of a few new sites in Alberta, such as Gull Lake and the Alberta Grain Terminal in Edmonton (think Prairie Falcons [*Falco mexicanus*] and Gyrfalcons [*Falco rusticolus*] attacking all of those Rock Pigeons [*Columba livia*] feeding on spilled grain). This is the second “Best Places to Bird ...” book (see my review of the Cannings’ book on British Columbia in Canadian Field-Naturalist 131: 85, <https://doi.org/10.22621/cfn.v131i1.1974>) by Greystone Books—perhaps a series is in the offing?

Of course, any ‘best of’ book will leave out some of the reader’s favourite places. One such place for me is Waterton Lakes National Park, where one can bird from prairie grasslands to the alpine in a single day. However, I cannot quibble with any of John Acorn’s choices as great places to go birding. The Alberta chapter does not seem to have any geographical order to the sequence of sites, so it is harder for birders to read up on good areas in proximity to where they are. The Manitoba section is also quite random, while the Saskatchewan section handles this much better. There is a two-page map spread of the three provinces immediately after the table of contents, with the sites named and numbered. The relevant map is then repeated in advance of the descriptive section for each province.

Each chapter covers a site and begins with a general description of why it’s special, often with personal anecdotes from the author. This is accompanied by at least one excellent photo of a species described therein. That is followed by a more detailed “Birding Guide” that describes what species you might expect to find, where, and in what season. The “Getting There” section is often longer than the “Birding Guide”, with lots of detail, which is helpful because many of these areas will

not be found on provincial road maps (and I suspect your vehicle’s navigation system might not be much help in some areas either). There is an excellent detailed map for each site which uses “terrain” view, showing streets and roads, rather than just a sketch map. There is some repetition between these two sections, but I’m not sure it could have been handled any differently.

I noticed a few typos and other errors: the photo of a Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*, p. 128) is captioned as an adult male but is actually a subadult male, which is also the typical age class to be found east of the breeding range. Right and left forks of the road were mixed up in the road description on page 139. And Archie Belaney was known as Grey Owl, and may have been great, but was not known as Great Gray Owl (p. 161; probably a result of relying on the computer’s spell checking function). The map of Beaudry Provincial Park (p. 208) does not label the “prairie trails” which are referenced in the description and which could be helpful. There is occasional inconsistent use of plurals of bird names throughout the book; for example, a sentence that references Canvasbacks (*Aythya valisineria*) in the plural and Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the singular (p. 241). An additional resources chapter, with websites, birding hotlines, agency/site phone numbers, etc. might have been helpful.

With the exception of Churchill, Manitoba, the book really only covers the southern third of the Prairie Provinces...but then that is where most of the access is, and the most habitat diversity. And that is where most of the human population lives and visits. If you are planning to visit any of these three provinces, or even if you live there but want to explore new areas, this guide will definitely help you to maximize your birding experience.

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