

BOOK REVIEW

Birds of the Pacific Northwest: A Photographic Guide, by Tom Aversa, Richard Cannings, and Hal Opperman. 2016. Seattle Audubon Society, University of Washington Press, and Heritage House Publishing (in Canada). 458 pp., ~1000 color photographs, 420 maps. Paperback, \$29.95. ISBN 978-0-295-99992-0.

This new regional guide is one of many covering all or part of the “Pacific Northwest” (or “the Pacific Southwest” if you’re from north of the Canadian border). I confess to having felt inundated by the annual flood of new bird guides. So my first question was, “What’s new here?” The authors confront this issue head-on: “Our working concept was to fill a niche between, on the one hand, the scientifically intense state and provincial ‘Birds of ...’ tomes, ... and, on the other hand, the widely used North American field guides which ... depict ranges and seasonal movements only at a broad continental scale (p. 6).” Their book also complements a plethora of guides limited to one or another local county and beginners’ guides to one section or another of the Pacific Northwest. This guide is definitely not just for beginners. It builds on three previously published more narrowly focused regional guides by these same authors (*Birds of the Willamette Valley Region*, R. W. Morse Co., 2004; *Birds of the Puget Sound Region*, R. W. Morse Co., 2004; and *Birds of Southwestern British Columbia*, Heritage House, 2010). Aversa and Opperman are based in western Washington, where they have devoted careful attention to the local avifauna for several decades each, while Cannings is of a family of highly accomplished British Columbia naturalists. They know the region and its bird life exceptionally well, which they define to include Oregon, Washington, Idaho, western Montana, and southern British Columbia from the continental divide to the continental shelf. To cover this broad region better, they enlisted advice from experts from Oregon, Idaho, and Montana to complement their first-hand knowledge.

This is an ecologically diverse region stretching from south to north from 42° to 54° 40’ N. Three major ecoregions—forested marine, montane, and the cold desert, each divided into five subregions—are described in some detail on pages 9–24. The authors then provide an introduction to and glossary of their technical terminology. At the heart of the guide are 412 species accounts, all species judged of recent annual occurrence somewhere in the region. While it is difficult to keep pace with the AOU’s annual taxonomic revolutions and their nomenclatural fallout, the authors are quite current to 2016, though they seem to have missed that the screech-owls are now *Megascops*. They treat one species per page, each illustrated by one to four photographs, with a color-coded distribution map. Each species account includes summary paragraphs with the headings “Description” (including details such as length, a few words on general impression, age variation, and sexual dimorphism), “Similar Species,” “Status & Distribution” (global and regional), “Habitat Associations,” “Behavior & Feeding,” and “Vocalizations.” The photographs are, whenever possible, by regional photographers (of which there are many, each credited in the caption) and taken locally (with provenance noted by county). The images have been selected to show characteristic postures and key plumage variants. The quality of these images is very good, and so far I have been unable to spot any mislabeled photos, a favorite game of reviewers of photographic bird guides. However, I’m not entirely sure about the “Pacific-slope Flycatcher” from Harney County, Oregon, and the “Thick-billed” Fox Sparrow from Yakima County, Washington, both identifications which are difficult at best on the margins of these birds’ ranges.

The range maps are highly detailed, in four colors describing seasonal occurrence. Some of these maps rival a Jackson Pollack canvas as they trace the region’s complex topography. However, they are, by and large, of a readable size. I find particularly interesting the details shown at the outer margins, where “California species” or

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“eastern species” just nick the edges of the regional maps. There is a great wealth of information captured in these maps, each apparently meticulously vetted by regional experts.

The discussions of similar species and of subspecific variation are most helpful and well informed. For example, the Canada and Cackling goose complex is very well described, with details of the features and distributional patterns of four subspecies of the Canada and three of the Cackling. The authors wisely judge the Lesser Canada and Taverner’s Cackler to be “difficult to separate,” though they point to the Taverner’s “shorter neck and bulbous-based bill noticeable in direct comparison (p. 40).” They nicely illustrate the three forms of the Merlin. Their treatment of the sapsucker complex is well illustrated, including the distinctive brownish first-winter plumage of the Yellow-bellied. Their maps of the ranges of the three “yellow-bellied” sapsucker species show extensive areas of overlap in their breeding ranges in central British Columbia. How, one wonders, do they maintain even a modicum of genetic isolation here? The Red-naped and Red-breasted Sapsuckers are said to hybridize “extensively in WA (Puget Sound nearly to Columbia River)” (p. 272). However, that hybrid zone is restricted to the Cascade crest. The authors anticipate the more recent split of the Western Scrub-Jay into the California and Woodhouse’s scrub-jays, both of which occur in the region covered. They highlight contrasts between the Olive-backed and Russet-backed Swainson’s Thrushes, which are quite distinct in appearance and vocalizations—and which might be split in the future—and elaborate contrasts between the Audubon’s and Myrtle Yellow-rumped Warblers. They withhold judgment of the vexed Western Flycatcher problem, noting that, “Many ornithologists believe further fieldwork may prove the ‘Western’ Flycatcher split untenable” (p. 295). However, they confuse the issue by showing the Pacific-slope Flycatcher as a summer resident of northeastern Oregon and adjacent Washington, where, in my experience, locally breeding Western Flycatchers are intergrades. The accounts of the Fox Sparrows and the White-crowned Sparrows may need revision. The distribution of the “Thick-billed” and “Slate-colored” forms of the Fox Sparrow is more complex than illustrated, and the sympatric nesting of *Zonotrichia leucophrys pugetensis* and *Z. l. gambelii* in the central Cascades of Washington state (Hunn and Beaudette, *Western Birds* 45:132–140, 2014) might have been noted.

Quibbles aside, this new regional guide fills the targeted niche very well with its comprehensive and sophisticated coverage of this key region of our continent. A close reading of the species accounts offers surprising insights and subtle identification clues not widely recognized, such as the eye-ring of the female Broad-tailed Hummingbird, which could be critical for Washington state listers attempting to distinguish this local rarity from the abundant Rufous. For the majority of serious birders in the West who tend to limit their explorations to one or another state or province, this guide should expand their horizons and encourage more cross-border birding. In sum, this guide is an essential reference for birders west of the continental divide, particularly for intermediate and advanced observers.

Eugene Hunn