

Book Reviews

ZOOLOGY

Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Maritime Provinces

By Anthony J. Erskine. 1992. Nimbus Publishing and the Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax. x + 270 pp., illus. \$29.95.

This book is the outcome of the Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas project, an effort that involved 1120 volunteers who spent 43 093 hours over five field seasons (1986-1990) systematically combing the three Maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia) for evidence of breeding birds. Although many people were part of the Atlas Steering Committee, it fell upon one of them, Anthony Erskine, to write up the results, a task for which he was well suited given his 30-year experience as a professional ornithologist working for the Canadian Wildlife Service (Atlantic Region). It is also a task which he fulfilled very competently.

The bulk of the volume is occupied by individual species accounts. Each of the 188 main species is given a full page treatment which consists of: (1) the name of the species in English, French, and Latin; (2) an ink drawing of the bird by Azor Vienneau; (3) a text of some 325 words describing the species' North American distribution, its natural history, habitat use, reported Maritime sightings before and during the Atlas project, and reflections on the past, present, and possible future abundance in the Maritimes; (4) an estimate of the current population size in each province; (5) a diagram showing the breeding chronology; and most importantly (6) a map of the three provinces showing the location of sightings, with dots of various sizes denoting confirmed, probable, or possible breeding. The original 10 x 10 km sampling squares delineate the resolution of the maps, but an additional map in inset is drawn to a resolution of 20 x 20 km squares, to smooth out inequalities in sampling effort within these larger squares. There are also 26 half-page treatments of peripheral species, and a list of 16 species that were not mapped because of questionable wild status.

questionable breeding evidence, or no evidence despite some pre-Atlas reports to the contrary. All of this is sandwiched between various chapters and appendices that deal with technical aspects of the project and its potential impact on the understanding and management of bird populations in the area. A list of 159 references, most of them on the biology and distribution of local birds, is a useful addition.

For the individual, the main advantage of owning an *Atlas of Breeding Birds* is to have a more precise description of a species' breeding range than is available from the maps of field guides. In that respect, it is noteworthy that this *Atlas* reports many "firsts", such as the first breeding Pine Warblers in the Maritimes (SW New Brunswick), the first breeding Indigo Bunting in Nova Scotia, and the first breeding Three-toed Woodpeckers in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia (Cape Breton Island), to name just a few. A birder can use the maps to learn where breeding birds of locally uncommon species have been sighted, and therefore where they stand a good chance of being seen again. Note however that the maps in this *Atlas* do not show towns and roads: there are many map overlays at the end of the book, showing among other things elevation contours, major rivers and lakes, and distribution of human population, but none with towns and roads.

Together with the *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Ontario* and the upcoming *Quebec Atlas of Breeding Birds*, this well-designed and objectively presented volume will provide birders with an excellent tool to locate the best areas to observe breeding birds in Eastern Canada, and to determine the novelty of any rare sightings they may wish to report.

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