

BOOK REVIEW

Birds of Nunavut**Garry Donaldson**Canadian Wildlife Service, Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada
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Birds of Nunavut by James M. Richards and Anthony J. Gaston, Editors. University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, BC, Canada. 194 pp., 805 color photographs, 155 maps. \$125.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0774860246.

For the past many years, I have been privileged to spend a month each summer steaming around the Arctic on an expedition cruise ship, often in the Canadian territory of Nunavut, providing ornithological support for a ship-based adventure travel company and student development program, both of which promote learning in culture and natural sciences as part of their programs. When I was a bit younger and still searching for that which I would do when I grew up, an opportunity to work at a Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*) colony in Nunavut for 4 short weeks changed the course of my life. My aim each year is to instill some of the bird-induced wonders I experienced that summer with my fellow expedition travelers based on discovery intertwined with a morsel of a unique kind of magic that only the Arctic can deliver. Invariably, birds play a meaningful part in this experience for me and the people with whom I travel.

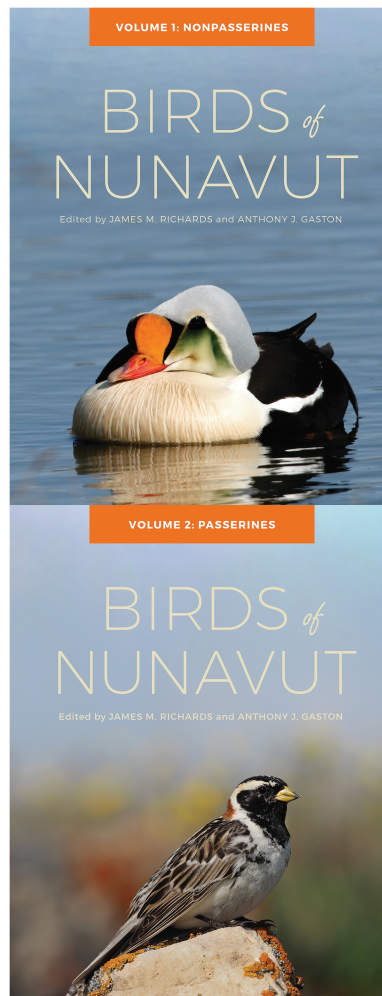
In the Summer of 2019, I was pleased to find the 2 volumes of the *Birds of Nunavut* in the library of the MV Ocean Endeavour, the cruise ship that I work from each summer that shepherds expedition travelers to their experiences in northern communities and natural places. My excitement on seeing the books was based on a couple of factors, the first being purely selfish. I knew the body of work was in development

but had not yet seen the published work, so my inner Arctic ornithologist was happy to see them. The second was that I now had a new resource tool for answering questions about birds in Nunavut in a general sense and could better explain to fellow expeditioners the details of those that were observed along our way.

In the absence of an onboard ornithologist, I believe travelers would be in good hands because the 2 volumes of the *Birds of Nunavut* speak for themselves. This became apparent to me when I started to leaf through the pages in the ship's library. The 2 volumes of this work seemed to be attractive to a wide diversity of passengers whom I can categorize according to the nature of their interest.

I will refer to the first category as the casual browser. These would be the people aboard the Ocean Endeavour who do not outwardly show a driving interest in birds or wildlife but who I have seen be attracted to the *Birds of Nunavut*. They may be judging these books by their attractive covers. Impressive photography and distribution maps illustrate the species accounts within the covers and make them interesting even if just casually flipping through the pages while waiting for the next adventure to start or dinner to be served. Many of the species accounts begin with a short and interesting anecdote that would appeal to the reader who may or may not be versed in Arctic birds and may be

more accustomed to getting their information in Tweet form. This lighter content allows readers to quickly learn



a few things about birds with minimal time investment and, in the process, may inspire them to dig deeper in the plentiful details provided for each of the species described at a later time. Also of interest to the casual browser (and all other categories) is the series of essays that precede the species accounts. Summaries of the geography, important and protected areas for birds, history of ornithology, and avian monitoring in Nunavut are written in accessible language and set readers up for a deeper understanding of the territory and its birds.

I spend much of my time aboard the Ocean Endeavour either working to cultivate an interest in birds in youth and inquisitive adults or satisfying the thirst for knowledge in those travelers more likely to slot themselves into the birder category. This category includes 2 different ends of a broad spectrum but they share a common thread in the need for resource material to learn and seek answers to their questions. Resources like field guides will give detail on what birds look like, where you might find them, and when you might expect to see them but do not usually describe much more beyond that. The *Birds of Nunavut* provides a big leap toward providing greater information, where that information exists. For example, distributions are indicated on a map as you would find in any guide but the maps here are enhanced by accompanying text that gives referenced details of when and specifically where species were found. Related to the maps, a feature that I really liked is the Where to See It section that directs readers to locations where one might expect to find the species in most of the accounts. Species accounts also provide details on behavior, habitat, diet and foraging, phenology, breeding, status, and threat information that you would never find in a field guide. The amount of this added information varies greatly among species but this is less about inconsistent editing than it is about either rare occurrences or how much we still have to learn about northern birds. Recognizing this, perhaps young bird enthusiasts from within Nunavut or beyond will be encouraged to contribute to our body of knowledge.

The detailed and specific information contained within species accounts of the *Birds of Nunavut* is of interest to the category of researchers and professional ornithologists. The editors have lined up a veritable Who's Who of contributors who have built their science careers around northern birds; their contributions are reflected in the high quality of information contained in each of the species accounts. Most of the details provided are referenced so that those wishing to learn even more about song display in the Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius*

lapponicus), the territorial behaviors of Glaucous Gulls (*Larus hyperboreus*) breeding in seabird colonies, or the changing frequency of "tick" calls in Buff-breasted Sandpipers (*Tryngites subruficollis*) can look up the original publications. Assuming readers have access to the references, this ability to dig deeply into the details beyond the pages of the books positions the *Birds of Nunavut* as a gateway reference for those looking for even more specific information.

Perhaps the most important category of people to read the *Birds of Nunavut* onboard the Ocean Endeavour are the residents of Nunavut themselves or Nunavummiut which is the term in Inuktitut, the language of many Inuit for whom these volumes were dedicated. What Nunavummiut would glean from the pages of the 2 volumes from their perspective is clearly not something a Qallunaat (non-Inuit) like myself can comment on, so out of respect so I will not speculate. However, this consideration underlies a key shortcoming that struck me of this otherwise impressive body of work. Jason Akearok affirms the importance of respecting what Inuit know (Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit in Inuktitut or IQ for short) in his foreword, but otherwise there is no Inuit-generated content about birds in the *Birds of Nunavut*. In a period of reconciliation between indigenous and colonial cultures, I like to hope that we can do a better job of advancing our collective understanding of the Arctic and other parts of the planet. Could Nunavummiut be offended by having this work dedicated to them when there is little of their own knowledge of wildlife included? Could the omission of IQ be seen as perpetuating their recent colonial past? Including an Inuit editor to oversee the inclusion of IQ at some level into the *Birds of Nunavut* would have made it richer for Qallunaat and more relevant and respectful for Nunavummiut.

Sadly, but for good reason, there was no Arctic expedition travel in the summer of 2020 to protect the health of the communities that these ships visit from SARS-CoV-2 infections and to prevent the perpetuation of the virus in the traveling public. I greatly missed my job as an enabler of knowledge about all things Arctic birds. Thankfully, for those of us who crave a dose of Arctic each year, we have these volumes to browse for a virtual northern birding experience until we can return. For those who have not yet been, I recommend reading the 2 volumes and, no doubt, you will be inspired to see the birds of Nunavut for yourselves.

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