

Birds of Lake, Pond, and Marsh

Amelia Hansen

John Eastman

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There is infinitely more to birding—an activity indulged in by those with avid avian interests—than mere identification and a checking off on one’s life list of sightings. Field guides are must-haves for the neophyte as well as the long-time birder, but once a bird is spotted and distinguished from others of its specific class, one wonders about this creature’s personal life—its nesting and mating habits, traveling habits, eating preferences, courtship rituals and survival of members of the brood after hatching and fledging.

Eastman’s books fall into the latter category. This second of a three-volume series—including *Birds of Forest, Yard, and Thicket* (1997) and the upcoming *Birds of Field and Shore*—gives the personal histories, with individual idiosyncrasies, of thirty-nine species of wetland and water birds. Eastman treats “each species from an ecological perspective—as community dwellers coequal with their plant and animal associates in the total complex of their habitats and environment.” He writes with flair, distinguishing differences barely perceived by the casual viewer. His chapters in this book confirm what this ardent birdwatcher has oft seen—such as the “relatively high occurrences of extrapair copulation and multiple paternity” occurring in mallard relationships. Eastman also includes historical data of whether a species is in decline or growth; all based on recent research of the last two decades. Herein he covers the waterfowl families of dabbling, diving and sea ducks, swans, geese rails, some hawks, cormorants, herons, loons and finches.

Eastman’s nature biography, along with Hansen’s beautifully rendered illustrations, bring the lives of birds and their habitats closer to the human eye and heart—while still concentrating on informing the reader of the ecology of each species (their interactions with other organisms and the seasonal environments in which they reside). Rather than “reciting the litany of environmental problems,” he writes, “I much prefer to climb into my hip waders, travel out to a swamp or marsh, and see what is there ... so that’s what we do in this book and this series—don waders, see some sights, hear some sounds. Come along.” Eastman’s work also has a bibliography from which to further expand one’s knowledge of and interest in birding and nature. An excellent addition for anyone’s library.

HANNAH MERKER (March / April 1999)

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