



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

New field guide honors trailblazer Roger Peterson

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When I started birding 30 years ago, North American birders basically had two choices of field guides: Golden or Peterson.

The selection and quality of field guides have improved markedly since then, and I have at least a dozen different ones in my home library.

But throughout the course of those three decades, Roger Tory Peterson's "Field Guide to the Birds of North America" has never left the mix. To this day, a well-worn copy remains within arm's reach whenever I'm writing an Aerial View column or researching a difficult identification question.

Now we learn that, 12 years after Peterson's death at the age of 87, and 100 years from his birth, a new Peterson field guide has been prepared for release next month.

It's a compilation of the best elements of Peterson's groundbreaking 1934 edition, married with 40 new paintings, digitally enhanced original art work, updated text and new range maps, plus links to three hours worth of video podcasts.

While the original book was small enough to fit inside a jacket or pants pocket, the new version is a more substantial 6 by 9 inches, combining the Eastern and Western field guides, which were originally separate volumes. These days, birders are advised to take notes in the field and to leave the field guide in the car or at home for consultation later.

Best of all, the new field guide employs the work of several of the country's most talented birders, including the latest range and distribution maps rendered by Larry Rosche of Kent; text revisions by Bill Thompson III of Marietta, editor of Bird Watcher's Digest; and paintings of new species by one of my son Bret's favorite guides, Michael O'Brien of Cape May, N.J. Thompson and another young birder's guide, Jeff Gordon of Lewes, Del., created the videos.

What better tribute to the man known as King Penguin than to preserve his legacy in the pages of his iconic field guide?

Truth is, so much has changed in the birding world that his field guide needed a serious updating.

I was reminded of this recently after stopping into a used book store in Charleston, S.C., where I found a 1947 edition of a Peterson field guide on sale for \$3.98. Most of the artwork is black-and-white, and many of the birds have been renamed and lumped or split into multiple species.

For instance, the old guide includes a Holboell's (red-necked) grebe, one skua (instead of two), a water-turkey (anhinga), a Brunnich's (thick-billed) murre, an old-squaw (long-tailed duck), a dusky seaside sparrow (now extirpated), a pine-woods (Bachman's) sparrow, an olive-backed (Swainson's) thrush, a Richardson's (boreal) owl, and a Hungarian (gray) partridge.

The new Peterson field guide deals with bird species populations expanding and shrinking, spreading and contracting ranges, and recent rarities. It reflects the discoveries by pelagic birders in recent years, with fresh art of newly found albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters. And it includes birds that have been showing up north of the Mexican border in recent years, such as crimson-collared and yellow grosbeaks, blue bunting, flame-colored tanager, golden-crowned and rufous-capped warblers, gray-crowned yellowthroat, brown jay, Aztec thrush, eared quetzal, rufous-backed and clay-colored robins.

In the July-August issue of Audubon magazine, author Kenn Kaufman of Rocky Ridge, Ohio, who has published his own set of field guides, credits Peterson with being his idol and inspiration. Kaufman lauds the late, great birder as an environmentalist who used his love of birds as a vehicle to improve the Earth, citing Peterson's crusade against DDT, his promotion and protection of parks, and his vast offering of outdoors books - not the least of which was his field guide to the birds, which has sold 7 million copies.

"Through much of the 20th century, Peterson sought to spark people's interest in nature so that they would work for its future," Kaufman wrote. "His approach is still effective today."

This new field guide should solidify Peterson's already monumental legacy in the history of birding.

Publication date is Thursday, Aug. 28. Price: \$26. Publisher: Houghton Mifflin.

To register for access to the podcasts, log on at: www.petersonfieldguides.com.

Sightings

A summer tanager was singing and posing for pictures at the Mill Stream Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks last week. Henry Fortlage discovered the bird in a stand of pines near where the Maple Leaf and Squirrel trails meet, Mary Ann Romito reported.

Romito also was excited to find cliff swallows nesting beneath the bridges spanning the Valley Parkway in the Rocky River Reservation.

A hooded warbler was singing at the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville, at the end of the woods near the marsh, Tim Fairweather reported.

Two clay-colored sparrows were seen along Quarry Road at Charlemont Reservation, Rochester and Huntington townships in extreme southern Lorain County last week, Ethan Kistler reported.

A forlorn white-throated sparrow has been singing every day for the past week in my Lakewood neighborhood. Another bird has been heard singing along the Zimmerman Trail in Headlands Beach State Park in Mentor, Ray Hannikman said.

Hannikman also had a willet at Headlands Beach last weekend.

Bobolinks and Savannah sparrows are abundant at the recently opened Frohing Meadows park in Bainbridge, Inga Schmidt reported.

You won't be reading about my trusty birding partner for the next couple of weeks. My son Bret is one of 14 lucky young birders from across the country chosen to attend Camp Chiracahua in southeast Arizona. I'll be sure to pass along his sightings and report of his adventures after he returns.

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