

Birds of MaineReviewed by **W. Herbert Wilson, Jr.**Department of Biology, Colby College, Waterville, Maine, USA
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Birds of Maine by Peter D. Vickery, Charles D. Duncan, William J. Sheehan, and Jeffrey V. Wells. 2021. Princeton University Press and Nuttall Ornithological Society, Princeton, NJ, USA. x + 642 pp., 12 color plates, 29 color photographs, 79 color maps, 119 line drawings, 20 text figures. \$45.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-691-19319-9.

Building on Ora Knight's (1908) *Birds of Maine* and Ralph Palmer's (1949) *Maine Birds*, Peter Vickery's magnificent volume sets the standard for comprehensive books on a state's avifauna. Over 20 years in preparation, this volume represents the culmination of the career of a gifted field ornithologist and conservation biologist. Sadly, Peter did not live to see the book's publication. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2015 and succumbed to the disease in 2017 (Pierson and Hunter 2017). Accordingly, the beginning of this book has an In Memoriam that will provide insight into Peter's well-lived life and his tremendous impact on ornithology in Maine. Peter assembled a team of experts to see the project through to completion, and I am sure Peter would insist that the people with the greatest contribution be acknowledged. The book has three coauthors, all with Maine connections and encyclopedic knowledge of Maine birds: Charlie Duncan, Bill Sheehan, and Jeff Wells. Peter's wife, Barbara Vickery, and Scott Weidensaul devoted huge amounts of time to behind-the-scenes as project managers and editors.

Any reader's first impression of this book will be its beauty. It is a joy to hold, and it is aesthetically pleasing from the first glance. The book jacket has a watercolor of four Razorbills (*Alca torda*) by Lars Jonsson. Twelve additional full-page watercolors are scattered throughout. In addition, over a hundred small line drawings of Maine birds by Barry Van Dusen accompany many of the species'

accounts. Color photographs, mostly of habitats and color maps, add further perspective into the beauty of various Maine landscapes and habitats.

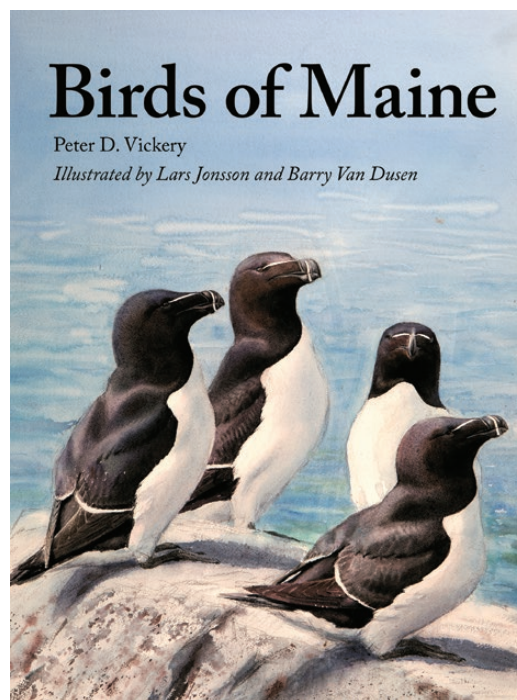
The front of the book has four chapters, written after Peter's passing, which serve to put his book into context and provide material that will allow the reader to more fully absorb the material in the Species Accounts. Barbara Vickery and Malcolm Hunter wrote a chapter on the distribution of birds in Maine, a state that is as large as the other New England states combined. Twenty-three species

reach their northern nesting limit in Maine, and 26 species reach their southern nesting limit. The authors help us understand bird distribution with a lucid discussion of Maine topography, geography, and climate with aid of full-page color maps. They also discuss the biophysical regions of Maine, a classification that many of us in Maine use for examining the distribution and abundance of birds and other organisms. High-quality photographs illustrate each biophysical region.

Jody Depres and Jeff Wells contributed a chapter on the history of Maine ornithology. From the mid-1600s when John Josselyn spent 8 years in bird study in Maine to the modern era, we learn much of the rich history of ornithological study in the state. We learn of Audubon, Thoreau,

and George Boardman, one of Spencer Fullerton Baird's army of collectors. Knight, Palmer, Cornelia Stanwood, and Alfred Gross are discussed as well. The chapter also chronicles and describes the influence of the Hog Island Audubon Camp, which was established in 1936.

Finally, Jeff Wells, Barbara Vickery, and Charlie Duncan wrote a wide-ranging chapter on the current status and conservation needs of Maine birds. The chapter begins opposite a full-page Jonsson watercolor of a Great Auk



(*Pinguinus impennis*). The authors begin by describing the differences between the birds that Ralph Palmer saw in 1949 and the birds we see now, including explanations for the declines in 62 bird species in Maine. The authors consider species by habitat and also by type of environmental insult. They use tables of trend estimates from Christmas Bird Count data and Breeding Bird Survey data to examine the patterns of population declines and rises within the state. Their discussions of a few success stories, like those of the Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) and Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), provide reason for some hope for some of Maine's birds.

Of course, the major strengths of the book are the species accounts and the book's special focus on changes to Maine's avifauna since the last comprehensive account in 1949. The past 70 years have seen the addition of 125 species to the state list. Population abundance of many species has changed over that time span. The book covers the five taxa that have gone extinct in the last two centuries: Great Auk, Labrador Duck (*Camptorhynchus labradorius*), Eskimo Curlew (*Numenius borealis*), Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), and the Heath Hen (*Tympanuchus cupido cupido*), a subspecies of Greater Prairie-Chicken (*T. cupido*).

At the beginning of every account, a single sentence or phrase encapsulating some aspect of the species provides a delicious morsel for the reader. For example, the book introduces the Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus*) as "the definition of onomatopoeia" and the Dovekie (*Alle alle*) "our smallest alcid is a flying, diving, black-and-white football." Some accounts have a map or figure to illustrate relative abundance distributions of species in certain locations, such as Purple Sandpipers (*Calidris maritima*) along the Maine coast, or findings from particular studies conducted on species, such as a color map that tracks three Willets (*Tringa semipalmata*) that were geo-tagged along the Maine coast in 2011 and 2012 and tracked to South America and the Caribbean. Another figure shows the dramatic recovery of Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nesting in Maine since 1962 following the collapse of breeding due to problems associated with the use of DDT. Each species account includes sections on status in Maine, historical status in Maine, global distribution, and global conservation status. Every account concludes with a discussion of the status of the species in each season a species is in Maine. Record high

counts appear here as well as early, late, or otherwise notable records. The migratory and nesting schedules of a species are easily gleaned from the Status in Maine section and the seasonal summary discussion. The detail indicates the thoroughness of the research in the book. I find the Historical Status section to be particularly interesting, where Knight and Palmer are generously quoted.

The book does not include information on identification, aging, and sexing of birds. A field guide suffices for that. However, information on feeding and other ecological factors often fails to find a home in either field guides or state bird guides. Vickery does cite details in some cases where the strong impacts of food availability have affected Maine birds. Examples include the association of the precipitous drop in Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) in the lower Bay of Fundy/Passamaquoddy Bay with a drop in the abundance of the copepod *Calanus finmarchicus* and the influence of European gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar dispar*) outbreaks on Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) pulses. However, the foraging ecology of most of the species receives limited if any attention. Appendices include a list of the current conservation designations of Maine birds at the state, national, and international levels. A list of hypothetical and failed introductions (mostly game birds) is quite interesting. This volume provides a rich resource for researchers. The exhaustive Works Cited section is 21 pages long.

As printing technology and computing power continue to improve, we expect the quality and appearance of regional bird books to increase. At some level, we should not be surprised at the high quality of *Birds of Maine*. Looking closer, a reader will be amazed by the level of detail, the organization and readability, and the quality of the artwork. This book is unparalleled among books covering the avifauna of a state or region.

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