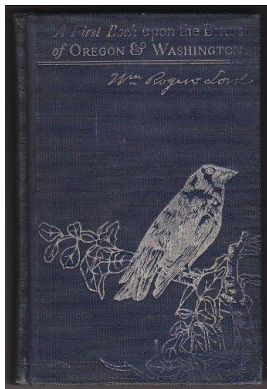


Birds Books in the Pacific Northwest Collection

By Diane McKenzie

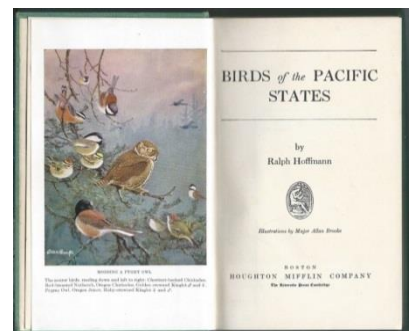
Recently, I read Scott Weidensaul's *Of a Feather, a Brief History of American Birding* (2007). I particularly liked the chapters on bird books and bird field guides. Of course, Weidensaul only talks about books covering the whole or large parts of the United States. The Pacific NorthWest Collection has books focusing on our region.



The oldest bird book in our collection is from 1902: *A First Book upon the Birds of Oregon & Washington*, by William Rogers Lord. I was pleased to see we have such an early example of a field guide. According to Weidensaul, this was when people were just starting to watch and identify birds. The activity was scorned by professional ornithologists who knew that the only proper way to identify a bird was to kill it and do careful measurements and descriptions. They called bird watchers “opera glass fiends.” *A First Book upon the Birds of Oregon & Washington* is pocket size, but nothing like the bird guides we are used to using. There are some

black and white photographs, mostly of a child or person holding a bird and, with rare exception, not useful for identification. Each bird is described and discussed in detail. I was not able to find out much about Lord except that he moved to Oregon from the northeast in 1899. His book was adopted for supplementary reading in Oregon public schools by the Oregon Text book Commission.

Another early guide in the Pacific NorthWest Collection is *Birds of the Pacific States*, by Ralph Hoffmann (1927). In 1919, Hoffmann moved to Santa Barbara, California, from the northeast. He had already published a field guide to birds in New England and New York that many consider the first true field guide to birds. His book feels a lot like the bird guides I am used to using and is geared to bird identification in the field. There are lovely black and white drawings and color plates of groups of birds by Major Alan Brooks. Hoffmann was particularly interested in ways to represent bird songs.



We have two editions of *Birds of Washington State* - 1953 and 2005. (The 1909 edition is no longer available in a useful format.) These are definitely not field guides but comprehensive volumes. The 1953 volume has information on 450 birds including status, distribution, ornithological history, and a description that may tell you if the bird is good to eat. There are a dozen lovely color plates

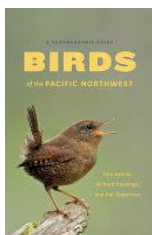
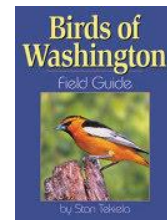


drawn by Roger Tory Peterson, distribution maps, and a few black and white photographs. The lead author was Stanley Jewett (1885-1955), a well-known and highly respected ornithologist who lived most of his life in Portland. It was largely through his efforts that we now have the Malheur Refuge and the Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge. The 2005 edition is called *The Birds of Washington, Status and Distribution* and claims to be the definitive source for Washington ornithology. There are only a few black and white drawings of birds, but extensive distribution maps, tables and information on 483 species, including effects of changing environmental and human activities on bird life.



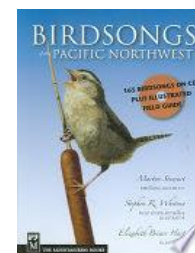
We have a number of true field guides specifically aimed at birds in Washington. *Birds of Washington State (2006)*, by Brian Bell and Gregory Kennedy is arranged by family, has a page for each species with large color drawings, distribution maps and lots of identification and other information. Bell includes the “Top 50 Birding Sites in Washington” with a map and information about each site. He covers 320 species.

Birds of Washington, Field Guide (2001), by Stan Tekiela is a small pocket guide arranged by color. I like that you can look up a female that may be brown and see a small photo reference to the red male (and *vice versa*). The author is a nature photographer and pictures are full- page, close-up photographs. Each photo has easy to read identification and other information plus a “Stan’s Notes” section with helpful and interesting facts. He covers 130 species.

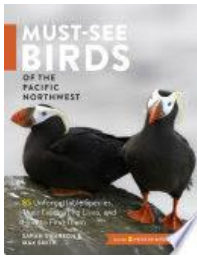


Another book that uses photographs is *Birds of the Pacific Northwest, A Photographic Guide (2016)*, by Tom Aversa, Richard Cannings, and Hal Opperman. This book is the standard field guide in size, arranged by family, and with two or three photographs of each species. The photos often show the bird in flight, in different plumage or differences between males and females.

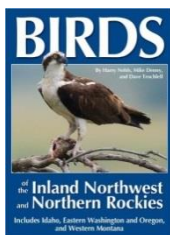
An unusual bird guide is *Birdsongs of the Pacific Northwest (2006)* by Martyn Stewart, Stephen Whitney and Elizabeth Briars Hart. Birds are listed by number coordinating with a CD of bird songs. There is a small print guide with color drawings and short descriptions. I could not help but think of Ralph Hoffmann and his attempts to describe bird songs in the 1930’s.



An accessible guide for the casual birder is *Must-See Birds of the Pacific Northwest* (2013), by Sarah Swanson and Max Smith. Birds are grouped by “what they are known for or where they are most likely to be found—like beach birds, urban birds, colorful birds, and killer birds.” The style is more conversational than a regular field guide, but seems to contain all the essential information. I am not sure what the criteria were for the must-see status, but it does seem to include my favorites. The book also has extensive information on weekend birding trips.

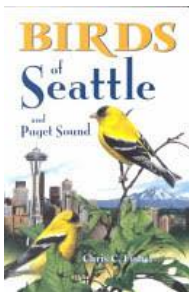
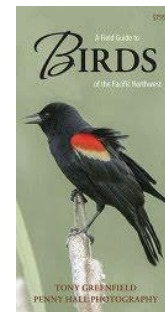


There are a number of books that focus on a specific area of the Pacific Northwest. I will mention a few but there are others listed in the bibliography. *Birding in the San Juan Islands* (1987), by Mark Lewis and Fred Sharpe is more of a book about the birds than a field guide. There are lovely black and white drawings and in-depth discussions of birds and where to see them in the San Juan Islands.

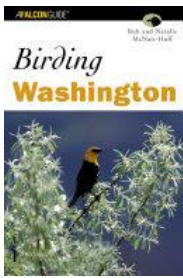


Birds of the Inland Northwest and Northern Rockies (2008), by Harry Nehls, Mike Denny and Dave Trochlell is one of the few that focuses on our region. It is paperback and pocket sized and has a strong binding so it can be opened flat. The birds are organized by family with photographs and standard information but no distribution maps. Each page has a few fun facts about the bird under *Did You Know?*

Tony Greenfield and Penny Hall provide an unusual approach with *A Field Guide to Birds of the Pacific Northwest* (2013). Instead of a book, this is a laminated, folding, photographic guide of 126 of the most common coastal birds of Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and Alaska. In spite of the compact size, each species is labelled with common name, size, distribution range and habitat.

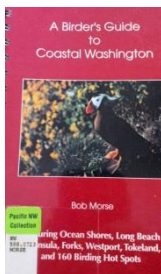
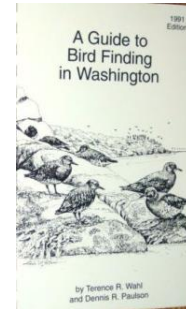


There are several books focusing on the Seattle area. Even though it may be dated, I liked *Birds of Seattle and Puget Sound* (1996), by Chris Fisher. Fisher arranges his book generally by family (he calls it phylogenetic order) and uses large colorful drawings with icons to indicate habitat and useful monthly graphs to show when each bird is most likely to be seen. Rather than an itemized list of information on each bird, there is a paragraph or two relating bird behavior to the Seattle area.



Other books focus on the places to go to see birds rather than on bird identification. *Birding Washington* (2005), by Rob and Natalie McNair-Huff covers the entire state by region. (Our area is divided between Central and Northeast). It provides much more than directions and maps. There are black and white photographs and lengthy descriptions of specific areas and inserts with ecological information such as “The Disappearing Shrub Steppe Habitat”, “Brown Pelicans Bouncing Back” or “The Disappearing Lewis’s Woodpecker”.

I am fascinated by how our book collection can document changes in our environment. You can see this if you use some of the older place finding guides. *A Guide to Bird Finding in Washington*, (1972 and 1991) by Terence Wahl and Dennis Paulson covers the entire state by county and major parks. I like that it also lists Washington mammals, amphibians and reptiles since birding often involves looking at other animal species. It includes maps and driving instructions, but be flexible, since roads and birding areas may have changed.



A Birder's Guide to Coastal Washington, (2001) by Bob Morse has maps and extensive directions to 160 places to see birds. He also includes color photos and interesting details on trails, history and other information on birding areas. The Appendices have color photos and information on 82 coastal birds.

In addition to bird field guides, the Pacific Northwest Collection has some early bird check lists: *The Birds of Walla Walla and Columbia Counties, Southeastern Washington*, (1918) by Lee Raymond Dice, a reprint from *The Auk*, and *Distributional Check-List of the Birds of the State of Washington* (1934) by E.A. Kitchin. (The library at Puget Sound University is named for Kitchin.)

There are new ways to help in identifying birds. Many people now rely on free phone apps such as the *Bird Guide App* from Cornell Lab of Ornithology (<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search/>) or *The Audubon Bird Guide App* from the National Audubon Society (<http://www.audubon.org/apps>). Be sure to check out the Wenatchee Naturalist website for more about these and other online bird guides (<http://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/birds/identification-guides/>).

Many thanks to Neal and Susan, the people I always rely on for help identifying any bird (or plant or salamander or snake, etc.)

Bibliography

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**indicates the title was mentioned in the article*

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NW 639.2 GREAT W

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NW 639.2 GREAT W

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Also, check out this blog by Laura Erickson for more on the history of bird field guides: *Closer Look at North America Field Guides*, (2011) <http://blog.lauraerickson.com/2011/09/closer-look-at-field-guides.html>

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