

Book Review: The Crossley ID Guide to Waterfowl

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January 14, 2018

I couldn't wait to purchase the new *Crossley ID Guide to Waterfowl*. I already own his guides to raptors and birds of the eastern US. I keep waiting for a western guide to complete my collection. Why so many? Because they are unlike any other bird guides I own (and I have a bookcase full). Most guides give you one or two pictures of each bird; Crossley gives you hundreds.

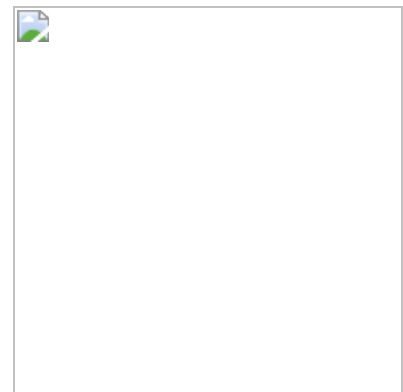
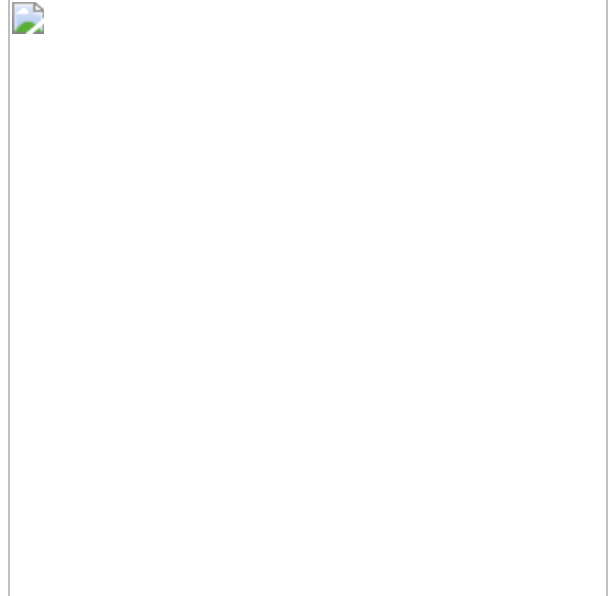
For waterfowl, he provides photos of the birds in winter/spring and summer/fall, when waterfowl are in completely different plumage. He includes adults and immature birds, males and females, birds that are molting, and birds with chicks. On a separate page, he shows the birds in flight, especially challenging for IDs. He even gives comparative views, like the page of all the swan bills. You also get challenging quiz pages, with the answers in the back!

I gave up trying to count the photos of the Mallards standing on the ice so that you can see their orange feet. Some are close up and others far away, just like in real life. The third plate on Mallards focuses on attracting mates, where we learn that Mallards "seemingly copulate more than other ducks."

Crossley concludes his discussion and photos of Mallards with a plate that helps you understand what creates color in bird feathers. Each of the plates shows the birds in actual locations where they might be found, like the Common Eiders off the New England coast and at sea near an iceberg.

The *Crossley ID Guide* is filled with challenges, like the quiz that asks you identify ducks that are flying away, with nothing but rear ends showing or the view of ducks overhead showing nothing but bellies.

The second half of the Guide contains in-depth information about each bird, including distribution, measurements, first impressions, similar species, sounds. Diet, nesting, and conservation status are included. There is even an extended discussion of migration called a "Year in the Life" and notes about hunting.



I enjoyed learning other common or regional names for the waterfowl. Did you know that the Canada Goose is also known as a honker or a greater? In Mexico, it's ganso Canadiense. At least one people in the Arctic call it "tuutangayagpak."

All the Crossley Guides are large and quite heavy, making them not especially usable in the field. I keep my raptor guide in the side pocket of our car door, just in case. However, Crossley offers a nice foldup card of the waterfowl that you can carry in a pocket.

Despite the great attraction of the plates and the quizzes, I'd advise you to read the introductory material. It's very helpful and interesting. Crossley provides six keys to identification that can help every birder become more skilled. His first key is size. Although size may seem difficult to judge in the field, he finds people become really good at it with a little practice. Next are shape and behavior. Color comes fourth. He explains that while we are naturally attracted to color, color is highly variable. He concludes the list with habitat, probability, and sound.

The *Waterfowl ID Guide* is filled with interesting information, all designed to help you increase your field skills.

Richard Crossley, Paul Baicich, Jessie Barry
Crossley Books 2017