

Reviews

***Skuas and jaegers. A guide to the skuas and jaegers of the world.* Olsen, K.L. & Larsson, H. 1997. Mountfield, Sussex: Pica Press. 190 pp. 13 colour plates, 156 figures (drawings and colour and B&W photographs) and seven maps, 12-page bibliography (hard cover). UK£ 24.00. ISBN 1-873403-46-1.**

This profusely illustrated guide covers the members of the sub-family Stercorariinae, treated by the authors as containing seven species in two genera, *Catharacta* and *Stercorarius*. For each species information is given under the heads Field Identification, Voice, Molt, Detailed Description, Geographical Variation, Measurements, Weight, Food, Breeding, and Migration and Wintering, and for some species on variants and hybridization. Much more information is given than is found in a regional field guide,

as would be expected when only seven species are spread over 190 pages.

Individual variation in appearance is large in several skua species, especially the smaller *Stercorarius* species, and this book will allow the marine ornithologist and dedicated birder alike to attempt to identify skuas they see not only to species but to age classes as well, along with a deal of more information.

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Received 16 December 2001

***The Marbled Murrelets of the Caren Range and Middlepoint Bight.* Jones, P.H. 2001. Vancouver: Western Canada Wilderness Committee. 149 pp. including numerous line drawings by the author. Can.\$ 34.95. ISBN 1-895123-13-5.**

When Paul Jones retired to British Columbia's lower mainland in 1990, he devoted himself to the protection of the ancient forests of the Caren Range on the Sechart Peninsula, just north of Vancouver. *The Marbled Murrelets of the Caren Range and Middlepoint Bight* summarizes the observations and experiences of Paul and his associates within 'Friends of the Caren' (a local conservation group), during a decade of conservation work in that area.

The Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus* is a bird of considerable interest, both for its strange breeding biology and for its relevance to the conservation of old-growth forests. It is the only auk that nests inland, laying its single egg on a mossy pad high in the branches of some lofty forest tree. Nearly all of the nests so far discovered in British Columbia have been in commercially exploitable old-growth forests, so the continued existence of the species in B.C. appears to be inextricably linked to the conservation of coastal forests.

In 1993, Paul was personally involved in the discovery of the first active Marbled Murrelet nest to be found in British Columbia (and one of only a handful known at the time). He single handedly located a second active nest in 1997. These events and his subsequent observations at both sites, the first one occupied in two successive years, are chronicled in detail in the book. Many aspects of behaviour described were observed for the first time ever by Paul and his companions. This natural history material is interwoven with accounts of the problems and rewards of studying such a cryptic bird living high in the wet forests of the B.C. coastal mountains.

In addition to observations made at the Marbled Murrelets' nests, there is an account of the birds' behaviour on the sea, in

Middlepoint Bight, where Paul spent many days observing them and carrying out boat surveys to estimate numbers. The text is scattered with other natural history anecdotes, on birds, flowers, frogs and insects. Overall, the author paints an exciting picture of the richness of the Caren Forests. I was especially taken with the description of the forest itself with its incredibly ancient trees – possibly the oldest organisms on the planet.

In the last two chapters, Paul outlines his opinion of the 'official' attempts to develop a conservation strategy for Marbled Murrelets in British Columbia. He is critical of the government agencies involved (the Canadian Wildlife Service, for which I myself work, and the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks) and also of the research carried out in Desolation Sound by a team from Simon Fraser University. Although parts of the ancient forests of the Caren have now been protected by the Province, he doubts whether the area (about 1000 ha) is sufficient to maintain the integrity of this amazing ecosystem in perpetuity. Some of his comments undoubtedly have merit.

I think that having tireless, self-motivated amateurs like Paul Jones involved in Marbled Murrelet research is an enormous boon to the community at large. It could potentially help to bridge the gap between scientists and nature-lovers. Unfortunately, the strong criticisms leveled against the Simon Fraser team in the book are unlikely to help with bridge-building. One thing that is clear throughout the book is that the Marbled Murrelets were studied as a tool to help protect the ancient forest. The murrelet nests were found exactly where they were wanted, in the ancient Yellow Cedars that are the crown jewels of the Caren. Those who were seeking to protect the bottomland forests of the Carmanah and Walbran Valleys on Vancouver Island likewise found Marbled

Murrelets nesting exactly where they wished for them. However, to provide an unbiased description of breeding habitat, you have to look for things where you don't expect to find them as well as where you think they should be. Someone had to find a way to locate murrelet nesting areas without introducing hopes or preconceptions and, whatever its other faults, this was what the Simon Fraser study rightly attempted to do.

I enjoyed this book and I learnt a great deal about Marbled Murrelets and the ancient forests of the Caren. For anyone inter-

ested in either topic, or in the story of what one committed individual can achieve, I thoroughly recommend it. The style is accessible to all levels of reader and it is nicely illustrated with numerous sketches by the author. Paul makes no bones about his opinions and after a lifetime of working in forestry around the world, his opinions should carry some weight. However, for those who wish to delve deeper into the science of murrelets, and perhaps be exposed to some rather different views, he also provides an extensive bibliography.

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Received 27 July 2002
