

Robin, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow (2), Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, and House Sparrow.

The Neil Bennett Autumn Birding Classic is a fund raiser for the conservation programs of the Island Nature Trust. The Trust and the Natural History Society work together to host this count, raise pledges, and ensure that the birds seen are published in the Island Naturalist. Thanks to the many donors this year, \$1,315.75 was raised to date for conservation projects in memory of the late Neil Bennett thus continuing his work for endangered species. This year's funds are being used to support the Piping Plover conservation work including the International Census and the protection work at Cabot Park during CJ'2001.

LOOKING AT BIRDS, IN METICULOUS DETAIL:

by E. Vernon Laux

Once in a great while, a natural history book changes the way people look at the world. In 1838, John James Audubon's "Birds of America" was one, the first illustrated book of North American birds. In 1934, Roger Tory Peterson produced "Field Guide to the Birds," the first to use paintings and drawings to depict living birds as they appear in the field, with arrows pointing to specific markings.

Peterson's guide stood the publishing world on its head with its instant and widespread popularity. The Peterson system, as it has become known, spawned a series of highly useful guides that is still going strong.

Now comes "The Sibley Guide to Birds," an encyclopedic illustrated guide to the birds of North America. Many people, this writer included, did not see the need for another guide to North American birds. It shows how wrong one can be.

"David has just raised the bar," said Pete Dunne, author of numerous books and director of the New Jersey Audubon Society's Cape May Bird Observatory. "This book represents the high-water mark for bird guides.

Each species is depicted in a clear and easy to understand way with multiple illustrations starting with the flying bird from above and below, a first for any guide and a feature that will be extremely useful to intermediate and advanced birders who often deal with birds overhead at migratory hot spots along either coast or inland.

And each species is shown in juvenile, immature, male and female plumages, both ordinary and breeding, more than other guides attempt.

Of course, no subject is ever going to look exactly like the illustration. A drawing is a composite of the artist's experience and a photograph is a record of a fleeting instant, a snapshot in time. Generally, though, paintings and drawings of birds can do much more than photographs to emphasize field marks. And, when the artist is a master birder, with an eye for detail and tremendous field experience, the results have a much greater chance of depicting what it is one may actually see when confronted with a certain species in the field.

Birds, specifically sketching, drawing and painting them, have been the central theme for Mr. Sibley's life from as far back as he remembers. He began observing birds when he was 7, and by 12 he was photographing birds in the hand, sketching birds and had already amassed an impressive volume of data.

That skill as a field observer, married with his gifts as an artist, has given the guide a distinctive, personal feel. Whereas most field guides are collaborative efforts, this one is the way Mr. Sibley wanted it, envisioned it and shaped it in more than a decade of work. It is the guide as he always wished he could use.

Each species has its common and scientific names as well as its average measurements, including length, wingspan (also a first for a North American guide) and weight in both imperial and metric systems....

When the idea came to him about how to organize the species, depicting each bird with separate