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BOOK REVIEW

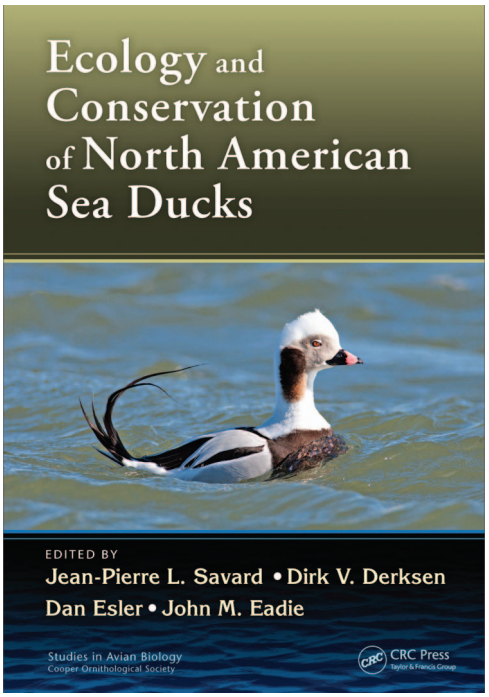
Ecology and Conservation of North American Sea Ducks

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Ecology and Conservation of North American Sea Ducks edited by Jean-Pierre L. Savard, Dirk V. Derksen, Dan Esler, and John M. Eadie. *Studies in Avian Biology* Number 46. 2015. Cooper Ornithological Society, and CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida. xxii + 584 pp., 4 color plates, 98 text figures. $119.96 (hardcover). ISBN 13:978-1-4822-4897-5.



The editors of this volume have accomplished a remarkable assemblage of authors and topics on the sea duck tribe (*Mergini*) that has not been covered before in a single major treatise. While waterfowl (*Anseriformes*) are, arguably, the family of wild birds that have been most thoroughly studied by scientists, the sea ducks have been relatively poorly covered because of the remote habitats in which most of them are found at all times of the year. Only a few, such as the Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), Barrow's Goldeneye (*B. islandica*), Bufflehead (*B. albeola*), and Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) are accessible fairly easily to researchers. The other 11 extant species nest primarily in boreal, Arctic, or sub-Arctic habitats, and typically winter in even more remote oceanic locations. Nevertheless, waterfowl are one of the best inventoried of all North American birds, and sea ducks have been the subject of several additional surveys designed to monitor specific populations (Chapter 1). Most sea duck populations are uncommon, and many have been declining in number to the point that North American populations of two of the eiders, Spectacled *(Somateria fischeri)* and Steller's (*Polysticta stelleri*), are listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. In Canada, eastern populations of Harlequin duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) and Barrow's goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) are Species of Concern.

The most significant upshot of this growing concern has been the formation of the Sea Duck Joint Venture of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan in 1998 (Sea Duck Joint Venture Management Board 2008, Sea Duck Joint Venture 2013). This has provided a superb forum for the sea duck specialists of the world to meet, plan, coordinate, and implement new science and to take other steps to stimulate progress in sea duck conservation. The 27 authors of this volume represent essentially all the individuals and government agencies and academic institutions that have driven the tremendous progress made since 1998.

The fifteen chapters cover every major topic that one would expect. This is a departure from the more typical approach to taxonomic groups which usually cover each topic on a species-by-species basis. This was a thoughtful tactic as it encourages the broader community of scientists to integrate sea duck information into their analyses while, at the same time, provides important new perspectives for those more narrowly focused on waterfowl. Some new information is provided and the literature reviewed is thorough with all the common sources cited. In addition, a great deal of less common material is integrated by specialists in the general topics. These qualities contribute importantly to the editors' central objective "to highlight

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the remaining data gaps that must be addressed to facilitate continued efforts to conserve this fascinating group of waterfowl."

I saw no major faults in the volume. I noticed just a couple of awkward passages, but the technical and copyeditors did an excellent job of producing a high-quality treatise. Each chapter has several hundred references. Many are repeated in several chapters, a fact that may have urged consideration of combining all the literature-cited sections into one. Another nit would be the excellent 4 pages of color photos near the middle of the book which are unnecessarily repeated with the same legends in black-and-white in the Appendix. However, this reviewer would like to have seen many more color photos of the birds, as I think the objective of stimulating interest in sea ducks may have been furthered by such a step. The superb photo of the Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) on the cover certainly helps make this case.

Each chapter is thorough in covering the published and some unpublished new science on the ecology and management of sea ducks. Each is also critical in pointing out deficiencies in the data and suggesting how future work could most effectively be approached. There are many challenges, for sure, and each chapter does an excellent job of providing guidance to help assure that future workers proceed as quickly as possible to the best opportunities for progress. *Ecology and Conservation of North American Sea Ducks* promises to be looked back upon as a pivotal milestone when the next synthesis of sea duck science is assembled.

This a must-have book for scientists whose focus is waterfowl. However, every science library must also have it for others with more general interests ranging from environmental contaminants to population dynamics to diseases and parasites to reproductive strategies, breeding behavior, and more. Essentially everything that has been the subject of study within the *Mergini* is addressed thoroughly and carefully.

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