

Book Review

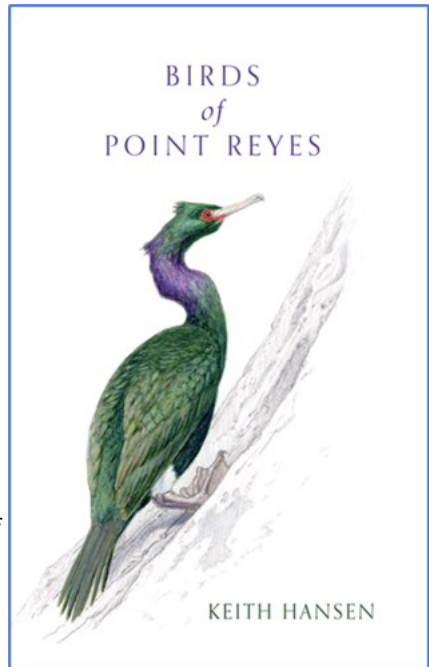
Birds of Point Reyes, by Keith Hansen. Heyday Books, Berkeley, California. 2023. 80 pp.

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This compact book, *Birds of Point Reyes*, by artist and author Keith Hansen is a brief but colorful introduction to the diverse birdlife of the Point Reyes Peninsula in Marin County. Keith is widely known in the birding world in California and he's a welcome presence every year at the Bird Club symposium where he displays his artwork, books, and identification expertise. His paintings and sketches are found in many books on western birds.

The press, Heyday Books, has recently published several other short books by Keith and others on local birdlife - *Birds of Lake Merritt*, *Birds of Berkeley*, and *Birds of the Delta*. Each in this series follows a similar format which includes delightful, accurate illustrations paired with species accounts that contain spirited and sometimes humorous anecdotes.



Point Reyes is one of the most exciting spots to bird on the California coast and from his home base in Bolinas, Keith has developed an intimate knowledge of the birds there. Jutting into the ocean west of the San Andreas fault, this rolling peninsula with its dairy ranches, cypress groves, and languid tidal estuaries supports a wide variety of birds, especially during migration and in winter. Nearly 500 bird species have been found in Point Reyes National Seashore, the highest number for any national park. This has made Point Reyes a mecca for birders for decades.

In the 1960s and 1970s it was discovered that during migration the “islands” of Monterey Cypress trees and willow-covered ravines dotting the open ranch lands of the outer Point attracted an astonishing number of rare vagrant eastern warblers and other neotropical migrants. In 1965, the Point Reyes Bird Observatory began operations at Palomarin in the southern part of the Seashore. Point Blue (as PRBO is known today) has been a leader in Western field ornithology and conservation science for 60 years. In spring and summer, breeding Common Murres, Pigeon Guillemots, and Black Oystercatchers can be viewed from the lighthouse and other coastal vantage points, and during migration a spotting scope aimed westward can reveal immense flocks of shearwaters, loons, sea ducks and other near-shore and pelagic species. *The Birds of Point Reyes* celebrates this diversity, the spectacular land-ocean interface, and the special qualities that make this a unique place.

Twenty-seven full color plates are included along with natural history accounts of 46 species that one might expect to encounter during a day or two of birding. The plates are nicely reproduced, although not all are originals; some are also found in Hansen’s *Field Guide to the Birds of the Sierra Nevada*. A short introduction includes a location map, an orientation to the landscape, and tips on how to get the most out of a field trip.

This book is aimed squarely at beginning birders, but experienced birders exploring the area for the first time will also find much to enjoy. You won’t find extensive natural history, but readers are certain to expand their knowledge of the birds they may already know well. This is not a field guide, a detailed site guide, nor does it include a list of the avifauna. These are not the author’s objectives. The goal is a fun and engaging read, and for this purpose it succeeds.

The species accounts are sprinkled with interesting and playful observations. For example, did you know that Double-crested Cormorants seem to have an “Adam’s apple”? ...or that Great Horned Owls launch from shoreline trees to swoop silently out over



Drakes Bay to grab sleeping Surf Scoters? One account sets us into the crown of a tall Redwood, rubbing shoulders with a migrating Townsend's Warbler as it embarks at daybreak on its journey south. Another account asks us to listen closely on a calm day for the "tooting" sound made by the swiftly-beating wings of a Surf Scoter as it takes flight. A Nuttall's White-crowned Sparrow is described and illustrated in all its subtle, sub-specific appearance. The "ringing trills and diverse riffs (of a Rock Wren)...cascade and tumble down the steep, tortured strata of Point Reyes colossal face."

Keith possesses a keen eye for painting his subjects in a style that can give viewers an unusual or surprising perspective. A kingfisher with bill open; a snipe in a hunched position; a Lincoln's Sparrow with a sidewise, furtive demeanor. His plate of Northern Harriers has five individuals in flight – males, females and a juvenile – depicting the various ways they bank and soar. Keith Hansen encourages us to watch, observe, and think about birds differently, and this aim is accomplished handily in his book on the birds of Point Reyes.