

BOOK REVIEWS

THE AUDUBON SOCIETY FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS,
Eastern Region

John Bull and John Farrand Jr. 1977. Knoph. 776 p. \$8.95.

The greatest strength of this book is its collection of 584 color photographs, the first ever to illustrate a bird field guide.

More than 100 of America's best wildlife photographers contributed pictures which provide fine detail and a reality unmatched in any of the artist-illustrated guides already on the market. With a few exceptions the photographs are pleasing and show the field marks needed for identification.

Among the few photographs that fail to contribute to the overall excellence of the collection, the Eastern Kingbird is poorly posed and out of focus. It does not show the white tip of the tail, the key field mark. The Pine Grosbeak on her nest is a shadowy mass against a black background. The photograph labeled "Ruffed Grouse" is wrongly identified. Identifying birds in some pictures can be even more tricky than identifying some birds in the wild, but this one looks like a female Spruce Grouse.

Two young artists, Paul Singer and Douglas Pratt, produced the black-and-white drawings of birds whose flight patterns were needed. Drawings of a few others, like Bachman's Warbler, whose rarity or restricted range make them unlikely to be encountered by most bird watchers were also included. As though to insure that the photographs get the attention, the drawings were reduced to postage stamp size and stuck in the margins of the text. Nevertheless, the sensitively rendered birds bring credit to the artists.

The text follows traditional lines. Technical data for each bird are treated under five headings: description, voice, habitat, range, and nesting. A brief essay then may touch upon aspects of each bird's way of life, recent history, and evolutionary background. This material is fresh, stimulating and up-to-date....

With enough going for the book to guarantee its success—an innovative use of color photographs, good art work, and an interesting text—it seems a pity that the organization is so inept. In most bird books the birds considered the most ancestral, or primitive, are treated first and the sequence proceeds to those thought to be the most advanced, or

modern. Closely related birds appear together, allowing users of such books to become familiar with the similarities and differences that mark the natural groups. The precise order in our country is set by a committee of the American Ornithologists' Union. But the architects of this book have drastically shuffled the AOU list.

They order the pictures by "shape," a concept which takes into account bird posture, behavior, habitat—and color. The idea is to make it easier for users to riffle through the book and come up with the bird they want to identify. That sounds like a good idea, but unfortunately the execution of the concept forces so many subjective decisions that reasonable people might place some birds in...two or more categories. Confusion follows, both in the book and in the field.

Should pelicans really go among the "Duck-like Birds"? How can one guess that the cormorant he sees swimming, very duck-like, is in the book under "Upright-perching Water Birds"? How does one select a multi-colored bird's "most prominent" color, as is required of a user of this book? Is the Painted Bunting's most prominent color red? No, green, the book says. The Yellow-headed Blackbird, yellow? No, black. The Great Crested Flycatcher, brown? It's green, despite the description in the text which fails to mention that color!

The confusion does not subside as one leaves the pictures and turns to the text. Here birds are scrambled by habitat. Decisions every bit as subjective as before must be faced. To give just one example: the Horned Grebe is treated under "Salt Marsh"; the Red-necked Grebe under "Lakes, Ponds, Rivers." But in winter, when bird watchers are most likely to encounter these very similar birds, both frequent the habitat categorized as "Salt Marsh."

The success of the book as a whole should not be allowed to mask its failures. The simple errors probably will be corrected in due course, but in some future edition the shortcomings of the organization must be remedied. Then the book could come close to qualifying as the ultimate field guide.—JAY SHULER (Reprinted from *The News and Courier/Charleston Evening Post*, 26 February 1978)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: A quick survey of *Audubon Guide* owners indicates that nearly all regard it as a marvelous picture book and a useful supplement to the Peterson and Robbins guides. Everyone expressed a preference for one or the other of the artist-illustrated guides if he could have only one of the three books for use in the field.]

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE NESTS, EGGS AND NESTLINGS OF BRITISH AND EUROPEAN BIRDS

Colin Harrison. 1975. Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 10 East 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10022. 432 p. Illus. Index. \$12.50.

One of my most treasured possessions is a copy of *British Birds' Eggs and Nests, Popularly Described*, which was written by the Rev. J.C. Atkinson and published in London more than 100 years ago. It contains 182 pages and 12 colored plates illustrating 122 eggs. Harrison's guide has 64 colored plates illustrating 730 eggs and 145 nestlings. Comparing the two books gives us some idea of the progress that has been made during the past century in the writing, illustrating, and printing of bird guides. Yet both authors, in their own time, succeed in presenting, to borrow the words of the Rev. Mr. Atkinson, "at one glance, and in a very condensed and systematic form, as much information as possible touching the nest, its customary site and materials, and also the eggs, their number, colour, and markings, and any noteworthy peculiarities of each...species." Atkinson wrote to encourage "the youthful nest-hunter and egg collector"; Harrison, on the other hand, devotes two pages to warnings about the harm that can be caused by visiting nests and about the laws regarding the taking of nests and eggs. Times have changed, but the study of birds and their nests and eggs still fascinates us.

A Field Guide to Birds' Nests in the United States East of the Mississippi (H.H. Harrison, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1975) offers color photographs of nests and eggs. People

who own the Houghton Mifflin book may find the Quadrangle guide a useful supplement because of the fine nestling illustrations painted by Philip Bruton. Color photographs of the eggs are excellent, too. Viewing the great variety of sizes, shapes, ground colors, and markings, I wonder how many egg specimens in the British Museum were collected by people who read Atkinson's book.

At any rate, British and European bird students are indeed fortunate to have Colin Harrison's book to help them identify nests, eggs, and nestlings. I hope someone is working on a similar volume for North America.—EFP

WATCHING BIRDS: An Introduction to Ornithology

Roger F. Pasquier. 1977. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2 Park Street, Boston, Mass. 02107. xiii + 301 p. Illus. by Margaret La Farge. Index. \$10.00.

Pasquier's book provides a coherent and readable introduction to the study of birds, including their structure, behavior, and reproductive cycle. The author uses technical terms when necessary, but he does not burden the reader with scientific jargon. Ms. La Farge's drawings are useful and easy to interpret. Advanced bird students may prefer Welty's *The Life of Birds*, Pettingill's *Ornithology in Laboratory and Field*, or various other books used in college ornithology classes; but beginning and moderately advanced bird students will feel comfortable with Pasquier's presentation. *Watching Birds* is suitable for the high school or public library because it can be understood by the general reader. Pasquier is to be commended for having written an introduction to ornithology that is neither overly technical nor overly simplified, which is a far more difficult task than the average bird watcher might think. Specialists may take exception to the author's handling of one point or another, but the book as a whole offers a sound foundation for the intelligent and pleasurable pursuit of bird study.—EFP

THE AMERICAN ROBIN: A BACKYARD INSTITUTION

Len Eiserer. 1976. Nelson-Hall Inc., 325 A. Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois 60606. xii + 175 p. Illus. Index. \$12.50.

The thumbnail sketch on the dust jacket describes the author of *The American Robin* as an assistant professor of psychology and a "Robin aficionado." Basically I like the idea of having a layman write a book about a bird that particularly interests him; but after reading Eiserer's book, I have decided that bird books should be written by ornithologists rather than aficionados.

Some of the book's shortcomings are the use of attractive color pictures that seem pointless when printed without captions; use of published material, including one direct quotation, without giving proper credit to authors; and use of incorrect or obsolete nomenclature, including reference to the San Lucas Robin as still being considered a distinct species. In a misguided attempt to spice up the facts, the author often gives the impression that certain things robins do are unusual, baffling, or mysterious, when in reality their behavior is normal for passerines or at least widespread among birds of various species. Eiserer misused several common words such as *latter*, *apt*, and *enormity*; and he started far too many sentences with conjunctions. His worst offense in my opinion, however, was the consistent use of *who* in reference to birds and other animals that are not human. This incorrect and completely unnecessary personification symbolizes the shallowness of the entire book. Obviously the publisher did not have this manuscript read by an ornithologist or even by a moderately literate assistant editor.—EFP

FIFTY COMMON BIRDS OF OKLAHOMA AND THE SOUTHERN GREAT PLAINS

George Miksch Sutton. 1977. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Okla. 113 p. Illus. \$7.95.

This slim but beautifully produced book is a delight for the mind and the eye. Writing in the first person, the author departs from the standard life history material to share his

personal impressions of 50 different birds. Facing each species account is a color portrait of the bird painted by the author, who is one of our country's leading bird artists.

Dr. Sutton notes that he never has seen a sky as blue as a robin's egg, but he is still looking for it. He tells about banding Chimney Swifts. He shares the excitement of finding a female Scissor-tailed Flycatcher sitting on her second clutch of eggs while surrounded by the well-developed young from her first brood of the season. He tells us how Baltimore Orioles feed on bagworms. He makes us recall those rare moments when we, too, saw a bird doing something that surprised us.

If you like Dr. Sutton's style of painting and enjoy hearing naturalists tell about their experiences in the field, you will want to read this book even if you never have been west of the Mississippi River. In fact, 49 of the 50 species illustrated occur in the Carolinas, the Roadrunner being the lone exception.—EFP

CBC ROUNDTABLE

(Continued from Page 29)

population fit the range. One authority points out that when an animal population declines for any reason, natural forces immediately raise the reproduction rate. This is not an easy book to read (it abounds in words like "parodic" and "paradigmial"), but it is worthwhile.

The Birds of Pleasant Garden

Mrs. H.M. Draper Jr., of the Piedmont Bird Club, reports that the birds are doing well in Pleasant Garden. In early March, the Eastern Bluebirds were inspecting nesting boxes, having survived the winter. Red-breasted Nuthatches joined Purple Finches and Evening Grosbeaks at the feeders. Five Red-tailed Hawks were over the highway. And at dusk, the Drapers watched the courting antics of an American Woodcock, right in the middle of their chicken yard.

North Carolina Bird List Available

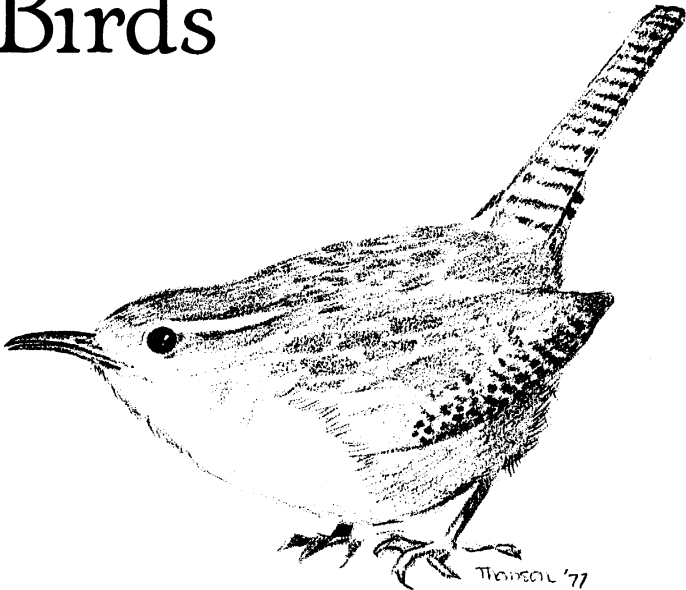
A *Checklist of North Carolina Birds*, prepared by the CBC Records Committee and the staff of the North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, is now available at the registration desk during CBC meetings and by mail from CBC Headquarters and the Museum. Single copies are 75¢ over-the-counter and \$1.00 by mail. Special rates are offered for bulk sales.

The 40-page booklet is dedicated in memory of Edna Lanier Appleberry, a past president of Carolina Bird Club. Mrs. Appleberry died last January in Wilmington.

So far only three typographical errors have been noted in the new checklist. On page 4 the number of species nesting in North Carolina is given as approximately 290, but the correct number is about 190. Following the Mandarin Duck on page 12, the dot should be deleted from the column headed "Birds, NC '42." The footnote listing the two hybrid warblers (Lawrence's and Brewster's) was inadvertently omitted from page 29.

In a state with lots of active bird watchers, any published list becomes out-dated quickly. Several first specimens for the state have been collected since the type was set, and the current issue of *Chat* adds the American Avocet to our list of breeding birds. Members of the Records Committee hope that the next edition of the North Carolina bird list will be similar to the excellent one published by Georgia Ornithological Society.

CHECKLIST of North Carolina Birds



CAROLINA BIRD CLUB, INC.
AND
NORTH CAROLINA STATE MUSEUM
OF NATURAL HISTORY