

## BOOK REVIEW

### ALABAMA BIRDS (second edition)

Thomas A. Imhof. 1976. The University of Alabama Press, University, Alabama. xv + 445 p. \$22.50

Every bird enthusiast eventually comes to own and rely rather heavily on state-level bird books, especially those concerned with the avifauna of his or her own state. Thus, a relevant question for each of us is, "What should a *state* bird book be?" A review of *Alabama Birds* with this question in mind may be especially interesting in light of the fact that a new bird book for North Carolina is a future probability. It is our contention that such works should be largely, if not strictly, regional or local in focus, and not too repetitive of readily available works more comprehensive in scope.

This second edition of *Alabama Birds* is completely revised and tries, with some success, to be much more comprehensive than regional. A beginning student of Alabama birds might well invest in this volume after purchasing a good field guide. More advanced students will find it useful for the wealth of local information not readily available elsewhere. Both, however, will be paying for much that has been duplicated from general sources.

Most of the text is comprised of species accounts for the 344 verified and 35 hypothetical birds on the state list. Although each tries to emphasize facts about the bird in Alabama, in many cases over 50% of the information provided is general facts on identification, nesting, feeding and distribution that are available in field guides. Perhaps the biggest problem frequently encountered in this kind of presentation is that of determining what portion of the information is based on local populations and what has been taken from the general literature.

Exclusively local information is in small type at the end of each account. This includes the period of occurrence; dates and sites of records, subdivided by physiographic province; and known time of breeding. Distribution maps are provided for 88 species and are a valuable addition, although in a few cases so many different symbols are plotted that the maps lose visual literacy.

The book also includes a short introductory chapter discussing bird study, the history of ornithology in Alabama, the physiography of the state, laws protecting birds, migration, and banding. There is also a glossary, and the bibliography of about 500 titles is arranged in a dozen groups and subgroups, which should facilitate reference finding. The book appears to be thoroughly and accurately indexed. A checklist with brief annotations inside the covers is a useful feature.

The illustrations are particularly noteworthy, especially the color plates by Richard Parks and David Hulse, some of which are outstanding. In spite of the fact that these illustrations are useful for identification, they are not different enough from those in standard field guides to warrant the additional expense, which probably increased the cost of the book beyond the means of some potential purchasers. There are also both color and black-and-white photographs, which are of diverse quality. Many have Alabama locality data, but a lack of specific information on a few of the more interesting photographs is disappointing. The caption under the Eared Grebe on page 55 that reads "Note the feet set far to the rear . . ." when the feet are not shown, is inexcusable.

In summary, *Alabama Birds* has some excellent and innovative features but suffers from a lack of clear purpose, trying simultaneously to satisfy both the casual bird watcher and the more serious student. This is a major problem common to most state bird books, and one that is often encouraged by publishers hoping for a larger audience. The result is an obvious compromise.—BARBARA B. LEE and DAVID S. LEE, North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, Raleigh, N.C.