

THE AUDUBON SOCIETY HANDBOOK FOR BIRDERS

Stephen W. Kress. 1981. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Illus. Three appendices, Index. 322 p. Hardcover, \$17.95.

Every new bird-watcher reaches a critical stage in the development of his interests and skills when he first realizes that he has learned to identify all the species he can readily find in the vicinity of his own home. Some people solve the problem by traveling greater and greater distances to add birds to their life lists, North American lists, state lists, year lists, or whatever other lists they may choose to keep. These people become known as listers. Others solve the problem by learning more and more about the birds close to home. These people become known as bird students. The purpose of Kress's *Handbook* is to help the inexperienced bird student become familiar with the fundamental techniques, field equipment, and publications used by professional and non-professional ornithologists.

The chapter headings clearly define the scope of the book: field trip techniques, binoculars and spotting scopes, observing birds, photographing and recording birds, educational programs, research programs welcoming amateurs, periodicals and organizations, and building a bird-watcher's library. The text is generously illustrated with black-and-white photographs and with drawings by Anne Senechal Faust. On the whole the author presents basic information in a straightforward manner with a minimum of technical terms and a blessed absence of jargon.

As will be true of any book covering a broad range of topics in some detail, there are a few lapses. Two I happened to notice because of my personal involvement. *Birds of the Carolinas* is listed only under the North Carolina heading, an understandable oversight because few bird books cover two states. In the captions for the illustrations of birds dusting and anting, only the control of ectoparasites is mentioned as a possible reason for these behaviors. Sunning is neither illustrated nor mentioned in the text.

On page 40 Kress cautions readers against "assigning human motives and values to bird behavior." Isn't that what he and others are doing when they assume birds take extraordinary measures to rid themselves of ticks, lice, and mites even though there is almost no supporting data based on the behavior of wild birds? I assume Kress took his captions from the general literature without bothering to read *Wilson Bulletin* 69:78-90, *Auk* 87:692-713, *Chat* 37:91-102, or *Auk* 91:537-563. These papers offer a considerable body of data demonstrating a correlation between the peak of postnuptial and post-juvenile molts and the peak of such grooming behaviors as anting, sunning, dusting, and—to a lesser extent—water-bathing.

Of course Kress's book is not supposed to be an encyclopedia of bird behavior, merely an introduction. My criticisms should not detract from the many positive aspects of the work. I particularly like the emphasis on keeping adequate records. How often does the beginning bird-watcher see something unusual and fail to write it down? Years later, when he finally realizes the full significance of the observation, he cannot recall even the date much less weather conditions and other pertinent details. Altogether Kress offers an abundance of sound advice and useful information that will get bird students off to a good start.—EFP