

## BOOK REVIEW

### THE COUNTRY JOURNAL BOOK OF BIRDING AND BIRD ATTRACTION

Alan Pistorius. 1981. W.W. Norton & Co., Inc. Illus. by Don Almquist. 274 p. Index. \$15.95.

The growing interest in birding across our land these past few years has not only given rise to a booming business for the makers of binoculars, scopes, birdseed, feeders and birdhouses, but also to the publication of numerous books, magazine articles and news stories on the many facets of birding. This is one such book, for the novice and advanced birder, alike.

The author, Alan Pistorius has a Ph.D. in English Literature from, and has taught field ornithology courses at, the University of California in Berkeley. He now lives in Vermont and has written numerous articles in such journals as *Natural History*, *International Council for Bird Preservation Newsletter*, *Country Journal* and *Raptor Research*. His style is quite readable, with bits of humor throughout. He appears to be an accomplished birder, knowledgeable about his subjects. He frequently shares information garnered from technical literature (well footnoted) in a way those of us without scientific background and training can comprehend. The illustrations are well-done pen-and-ink drawings, mostly action sketches, not intended to be field-guide quality.

The purpose of the book, as stated in the introduction, is to "chronicle and examine the major birding activities through a year in the life of a 'working' birder." He calls it a "home and away" book, with some chapters devoted to a basic bird-attraction "manual"; others, to major field birding events of the year from an inside point of view.

There is, in the "home" chapters much interesting and useful information relative to attracting birds, the value of which to the reader depends upon one's own experience and reading. Pistorius devotes a chapter to winter feeding, in which he explores the myriad of commercial and home prepared foods, their nutritional value and cost. He goes into the pros and cons of feeding at all, dispelling some popular myths against feeding such as one which says that out-of-season food sources will foul up migratory instincts. Another chapter describes types of feeders, how they should be located, jay and squirrel proofing. An example of his humor is seen in the discussion on the advantages of scattering seed on the ground. He relates, "A document I have before me claims that evening grosbeaks 'prefer to feed four or five feet—or more—above the ground,' but a food-preference chart on the adjacent page indicates that grosbeaks prefer to feed on the ground.' Both of course, are right. Where grosbeaks prefer to feed is at the exact level of the local sunflower supply—whether on the ground, five feet up in a feeder, or thirty-five feet up on the top of a telephone pole."

To this reviewer, the most interesting chapters are on Migration, the Christmas Count and Big Day Doings.

On migration, Pistorius points out early concepts on the subject, traces the history of knowledge acquired by observers, and summarizes the more recent scientific studies of bird navigation, orientation and the like. Perhaps the most novel idea is that we need to re-examine the cherished and commonly held notion that our country is divided into

four distinct and separate flyways. He suggests that this concept is now coming under fire as a result of recent investigations. He also introduces a newly discovered route or flyway that extends out into the Atlantic Ocean, which he terms the "Sargasso Sea Loop"—a route taken, for instance, by Blackpoll Warblers in the fall.

There are several pages devoted to hawk migration and astounding numbers, especially of Broad-winged, seen at Hawk Mountain in 1978 and Corpus Christi in 1977. He gives instructions for watching nocturnal migrants against a full moon—no way one can identify them, of course, but exciting viewing.

The chapter on the Christmas Count is both interesting and entertaining. Pistorius covers the subject thoroughly from participation in a well-established count to the setting up of a new one. It includes everything from the recruitment of counters, the methods employed, the pre-count stake-outs, the final compilation complete with the grilling of observers on rare finds. He even mentions the "privilege" we counters have in anteing up our two dollars for *American Birds*. His descriptions of counts which he has participated in were amusing, and I believe almost all Carolina Bird Club members can relate to the events therein. He tells of the headaches and worries of the compiler, from recruiting enough good birders to cover the area to getting accurate descriptions of unusual finds and sending the final report to *American Birds*. He mentions the difficulties of counting in bad weather, extremes of temperatures, high winds. Pistorius is a serious birder (aren't we all?), but he has the gift of poking fun at the whole experience, which I found delightful.

In the chapter on the Big Day, he relates a particular experience in Vermont. His story of the trials and tribulations of trying to cover as much territory as possible in less than ideal weather conditions is great. The element of fierce competition between the two groups of birders as to which one could find the most species reminds one of our Spring Counts here in the Carolinas.

The final chapter is called, "Mapping the Birds of Summer," the latest activity for birders. Called Atlasing, it is a field activity that has been going on in Europe for several years. This program undertakes to give a far more accurate picture of the breeding birds in a given area than the Breeding Bird Censuses and Breeding Bird Surveys have done. It is the hope of the instigators of atlasing, or mapping, to cover all of North America. Atlasing has strict rules, regulations and procedures which, if properly followed, should add much information to our present knowledge of expanding and contracting ranges. It could conceivably come up with some surprises. It should be a valuable and concrete tool for conservationists to use in their struggle to preserve choice habitats. Mapping the birds of summer provides additional activity for the bird student wishing for something constructive to do in the months between spring and fall migration.—GTW

### **Parrot Gives it Away**

In Australia, the rare Orange-bellied Parrot lives on Swan Island, where the Secret Intelligence Service runs a training school. When the Service announced plans to build an airfield, the Victoria state government said construction would endanger the parrots—and the secret training base was revealed.