

BOOK REVIEW

FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA (2 ed)

National Geographical Society. 1987. National Geographical Society, Washington. 463 pp. softcover, \$13.95 + 3.50 postage. Available only from National Geographic Society (NGS) or other non-profit organizations such as American Birding Association.

When it first appeared in 1983, the NGS guide was one of several new sophisticated field guides to be published within the span of a few months. The test of time has shown it to be superior to its competitors. Thus, in reviewing the revised edition, this observation must be kept in mind. As none of the competing guides (all having strengths and weaknesses) have published revised editions, the comparative value of the NGS guide is strengthened. Rather than focusing directly on the merits of the guide per se, I will focus on the quality of the second edition relative to the first, with particular emphasis on the Carolinas.

According to the press release with the advance copy I examined, NGS boasts that there are "54 new range maps, 5 totally reprinted plates, and 31 revised plates." As most field guide users refer to plates more than text or range maps, I will begin there. Of the 31 revised plates, I was able to locate about half quickly. Of those, approximately 25% pertained to species that occur regularly in the Carolinas. Of the five completely repainted plates, three are pertinent to our region. Perhaps more interesting (and relevant) was that for every one plate improved, I found at least three that equally required improvement and had not been touched. This was a distinct disappointment because I had heard (for years) that the new edition would be "completely redone." While I did not expect perfection (due to obvious time and financial constraints), what I found fell well short of my "realistic" expectations. Perhaps the worst cases of uncorrected plates (from the perspective of a Carolina birder) include: immature gulls in flight and winter-plumaged Phalaropes in which errors range from misleading to categorically wrong.

Of the improved range maps, about 2/3 are pertinent to the Carolinas, but many of the improvements involved only the addition of arrows indicating general migration routes. However, at least sixteen of the revised maps contain errors pertaining to North Carolina alone, some fairly serious. Among the worst are summer (rather than winter) distribution of Manx Shearwater, depicted state-wide breeding of Warbling Vireo (only known breeding from extreme NW corner of the state), and the lack of indicated breeding for Cerulean Warbler in the Roanoke River region (most common and extensive distribution in the state).

I found the greatest number of revisions in the text. Seemingly 50% of entries were updated, many significantly. Although I did not examine every species entry carefully, my impression is that these changes represented the greatest strength of the new edition. However, even here, I found problems. For example, Band-rumped Storm-Petrel is listed as "rare" in the western Atlantic with no mention of its recently discovered "uncommon" status off North Carolina. This is in contrast to otherwise careful inclusion of other new knowledge of seabird distribution off our coast.

Another strength of the new edition is the inclusion of recently discovered extralimital rarities and newly recognized species. The best of these are Clark's Grebe, Red-naped Sapsucker, Eurasian Jackdaw, and Red-breasted Flycatcher. Unfortunately, none of these species have been recorded in our region. Thus, the guide's usefulness increases dramatically for well-traveled birders who have a strong interest in listing. However, to this end, the omission of species such as Brown Shrike (recently occurring in California), but inclusion of much rarer

species such as Pallas' Reed Bunting (holdover from first edition) results in an uneven treatment of this group. Perhaps more serious is the exclusion of the newly recognized Arctic Loon (vs. Pacific), particularly as the new edition's plate of Pacific Loon has been "corrected" to show a relatively dark nape in breeding plumage. This is a mark of the Arctic Loon, not Pacific.

The question now comes down to the investment value of the book. As I said at the outset, I think that this guide is the best overall guide to have in the field. The detail of information and species coverage was (and is) superior to its competitors. Thus, if you do not have a copy of either edition, I recommend the second edition (the first is no longer available). However, if you already own a copy of the first edition, unless you like to collect bird books or plan to visit Attu a lot, save your money for something else.—M.H. Tove.