

BOOK REVIEWS

ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION OF NEOTROPICAL MIGRANT LANDBIRDS

John M. Hagan, III, and David W. Johnston, eds. 1992. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 20560. Softcover, 609 pp with index of authors.

This volume is a compilation of the proceedings of a symposium hosted by the Manomet Bird Observatory in 1989 and sponsored by a wide range of national and international organizations concerned with the future of neotropical migrant landbirds. Sparked by the need for a hemispheric alliance to protect the biological diversity reduced during the five hundred years following Columbus' opening of the New World to European immigration, the symposium's supporters invited a plethora of scientists to present the results of their research into the reasons for the population declines of these birds.

The symposium sought to address two aspects affecting population change: the fragmentation of North American forests in which many species seek breeding habitats and the loss of non-breeding habitat on their wintering grounds in the neotropics. By replacing speculation with scientific findings, it was hoped that a new set of questions to be answered could be formed, as well as a consensus on the urgency of the problem. The organization of the book reflects that of the symposium: sectional headings include "Trends in Populations", "The Nonbreeding Season", "The Breeding Season", and "Hemispheric Perspectives".

The theme of forest loss and its affects are heard throughout the book. It is not only the loss of total acreage that concerns many conservationists, but the loss of good quality breeding habitat. Particularly in the areas east of the Mississippi, not only has forest acreage been lost to farming and urban growth, but deciduous virgin forests have been converted to pine monoculture. Additionally, fragmentation has facilitated the range expansion of other species such as cowbirds that decimate the population growth of those birds that can find only less-than-optimal nesting sites. In the Neotropics, particularly Central America, loss of wintering habitat affects the stability of populations by removal of food and roosting resources.

The different papers published in this book provide a wealth of information on the status of these migrants. While quite a few detail research findings on specific species, many present an excellent overview of problems pertaining to all these birds. The included figures and tables permit easy access to facts about a reader's bird(s) of interest. Sauer and Droege's "Geographic patterns in population trend of Neotropical migrants in North America" provides a compilation of short-term and long-term population trends taken from the data of the North American Breeding Bird Survey and organized according to habitat requirements for one hundred of the most familiar species of non-passerines and passerines. Robbins' et al. paper on "Comparison of Neotropical migrant land-bird populations wintering in tropical forest, isolated forest fragments, and agricultural habitats" reports on a six year study carried out at over seventy-five sites in seven countries. Their findings are reported by species and habitat type.

Formulated by the symposium's participants and still to be addressed, the questions posed are both disturbing and thought-provoking. Certainly a great deal of research has already been done, but the need remains for more. Clearly the problems of population decline are multifaceted: it isn't enough for a migrant landbird to obtain a nesting site. It must also find a mate, food sources to feed the young, and then wintering grounds on which to spend the rest of the year. The hope for solutions lies in the commitment of conservationists to "tease apart" the differing factors impacting on the overall problem of migrant landbird population management. This book shows that they have made a good start.—Jacqueline Spencer

FINDING BIRDS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Robin M. Carter. 1993. University of South Carolina Press. Columbia, SC. Paperback, 254 pp. incl. index.

South Carolina has a long and distinguished history of bird study going back to colonial times and some of the most interesting of North America's avifauna are inextricably interwoven with the state. It is difficult for me to think of Carolina Parakeets without visualizing the low-country swamps of the Francis Marion Forest, or imagine the probably extinct Bachman's Warbler without thinking of I'On Swamp. Located as it is on the northern edge of the sub-tropical zone, South Carolina has the advantage of being the closest place to go to see really interesting birds. But as all members of the Carolina Bird Club know, finding those birds and the places where you are most likely to find them can be a difficult and time-consuming process.

Former CBC President, Robin Carter has taken some of the difficulty out of this process by writing what will probably be the definitive guide to prime birding sites in South Carolina for the indefinite future. Carter has birded all over South Carolina for years and has shared his experience in this 254 page volume. The book is laid out in three major (but unequal) sections; General Information, Site Information, and Species Accounts.

The first section on general information is thirteen pages long and provides a brief description of the state and instructions on how to make use of the guide. This is very basic information and should be read by anyone interested in birding in South Carolina. What I found particularly helpful was the provision of precise definitions of where Carter considers the boundaries to be separating the Piedmont from the mountains on one side and the Coastal Plain on the other. As these boundaries are rather vague geologically, but referred to repeatedly in most of the literature, it is extremely helpful to have some points of reference. Carter also points out the value in having a decent road map of the state and while none is provided in the text, he does supply excellent instruction on how to procure them at several levels of precision.

The second section of the book is by far the largest, consisting of 210 pages of specific information about sites (or areas) organized by counties arranged in alphabetical order. This can provide difficulties if you don't know what county you want to work in initially and can make reading the book