

result is that all birders will benefit from this video, not just those few who frequent the hawk watch sites during the fall migration.

While I find no major flaws in the content of the guide, there are some weak areas. The film sequences of Merlin and Golden Eagle are disappointing. Most of the Merlin shots are of birds flying low to the ground, and with all the clutter (trees, fences, etc.) it is very hard to see the bird. The Golden Eagle sequence is shot almost entirely through an overstory of tree limbs, and the auto-focus camera zeroing in on the limbs frequently leaves the bird out of focus. Also, there is no film of an adult Golden Eagle. The quiz is a "slide show" of 18 still photos (instead of the 23 video clips in the VHS version of the quiz). Many of the photos are of perched birds instead of birds in flight. (So break out the Peterson's!) Inexplicably, Crested Caracara appears in the quiz, despite its omission from the rest of the guide.

If you already own and use *Hawk Watch* in VHS format, I would recommend upgrading to the DVD version. There is new film footage of seven species, each providing sharper, closer images than in the original version. The new shots of American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, and Osprey are especially good. Being able to quickly access each of the groups via the menu is a real time saver, although I was disappointed that the species aren't listed separately, necessitating fast-forwarding through the groups if you are looking for one species in particular. All of the footage appears sharper and brighter, and represents a significant improvement over the VHS version, which in many cases appears murky and colorless. The introduction to the disc, as well as the introductions to each section, now feature close-up video clips of perched birds. These replace the rather amateurish paste-up still images in the VHS version and represent a big improvement in the overall aesthetics of the guide. The buteos are more sensibly arranged, with the rarely seen Rough-legged Hawk appearing at the end of the group rather than between the Broad-winged and Red-tailed as was the case in the VHS edition. The one serious step backward is the "slide show" quiz described above, which is definitely inferior to the video clip quiz in the original VHS version.

Regardless of these minor flaws, *Hawk Watch: A Video Guide to Eastern Raptors* is a must-have for any birder who wants to learn to accurately identify diurnal birds of prey in flight. —*Bill Sanderson, Asheville, NC*

Shorebirds: A Guide to Shorebirds of Eastern North America

Richard K. Walton and Greg Dodge

Brownbag Productions

DVD version (remastered and revised) copyright 2003

The updated version of *Shorebirds: A Guide to Shorebirds of Eastern North America* shows 38 shorebird species in different plumages and habitats. The video footage would be a great addition to any birdwatcher's

library. The video in most cases is clear and details are easily seen. A great feature is that we can stop the DVD at any moment to go back and study birds in still pictures. However in more than a few occasions pictures are of too low quality to let us see most of the identification features. Birds are shown mostly feeding with very few pictures of flying individuals. The order in which particular species appear in the video is rather strange; we can see a Dunlin between an American Golden Plover and a Red Knot, and a Ruddy Turnstone is between a Red Knot and a Sanderling. Nevertheless we can see beautiful shots of Pectoral Sandpiper and American Avocet.

The DVD consists of 5 Titles (or if you like chapters). Title 1 is video footage of 38 shorebird species. Title 2 is a general description of distribution, habitats and behavior of the group. Title 3 presents a short but good and clear explanation of plumage change in shorebirds and its consequences for identification. At the end of the Title the authors show a picture of a Pectoral Sandpiper with pointers to the most important plumage areas of the bird. Unfortunately scapulars are referred to here as "shoulders" and the mantle as the actually invisible "back". More detailed explanations would be very useful for better understanding shorebird identification. Title 4 is a quiz where in 13 photographs some 18 species of shorebird should be identified, including 2 species not covered by video footage (Jacana and Curlew Sandpiper). Title 5 shows references, however among very good books listed here, there is one more excellent source of shorebird photographs that is missing: *Waders of the World* by Rosair and Cottridge (Hamlyn).

The video narration consists of description or explanation of species' identification features. Unfortunately in most cases it concentrates mostly on bill shape (or color) and leg color (or length). Information concerning plumage colors and details is very scarce and rather general; detailed identification features are almost completely omitted, suggesting that shorebird identification is mostly about bill and leg length and colors which is absolutely not a truth! Just in a few cases we hear more detailed comments about coloration or different plumages. There is also almost no information concerning upper- or under-wing patterns or tail patterns where these features are essential for identification (Hudsonian Godwit, Black-bellied Plover, Red Knot, Spotted Sandpiper to name a few). For almost all species there are also very long sequences of video pictures lacking any comments, where explanatory words would be very useful. In addition, in a few cases the authors compare and discuss identification of species (such as Semipalmated or Pectoral Sandpiper) showing fall and spring plumages which are very, very unlikely to be seen at the same time! Nevertheless there are rather clear and straightforward comments with good video footage concerning Short- and Long-billed Dowitchers. However even here, the authors pay too much attention to the upper-tail pattern (a typical field guide mistake), which is a very overlapping feature and thus not of much use in the field.

Unfortunately there are two identification mistakes that should be mentioned; an adult fall White-rumped Sandpiper and an almost molted winter adult Hudsonian Godwit are both described as juvenile birds.

In my opinion the updated version of *Shorebirds* could be much more useful for birdwatchers who would like to learn more about identification of that group of birds. However with very short and rather weak comments (mostly only about bill and legs) the video is not very useful for beginning "shorebirdwatchers". In my opinion to identify most of the shorebirds we need to consider features like size and proportions, plumage and molt details, behavior and vocalization. We are not able to make a positive ID of the bird if we can not name its plumage/age features. On the other hand we can stop the DVD and study good quality pictures for hours, comparing them to comments, illustrations and photographs from numerous books.

I am not able to call the DVD a primary tool for learning shorebird identification. I would rather suggest using it for additional motion pictures when studying good shorebird field guides like *Birds of Europe* by Mullarney et al. or *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide* by Hayman et al. In this time of excellent digital cameras and numerous good sources (books, papers and internet), I expect much more detailed comments and more good quality pictures from a DVD about American shorebirds. –*Michal Skakuj, Durham NC*