

Book Review

Birds of Europe, Second Edition.—Lars Svensson, illustrations and captions by Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterström, with a significant contribution by Peter J. Grant, translated (from Swedish) by David Christie and Lars Svensson. 2009. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 448 pages. ISBN 978-0-691-14392-7. Paper, \$29.95.

Why would a Carolina birder want to own this guide to the birds of Europe? Perhaps to prepare for an upcoming trip to Europe. Perhaps to be ready in case a Fieldfare shows up in your yard. But most of all, in order to see what a truly excellent field guide looks like. Out of the profusion of field guides now available for North America, none provides the same quantity and quality of information in as little space. At a page size of 5-1/4 x 7-5/8" and 448 pages, it is roughly the size of the National Geographic guide, far smaller than Sibley. But the pages, with text on the left and artwork on the right, are densely packed. There is none of the wasted white space that characterizes Sibley. Discussions of field guides often argue the relative merits of paintings vs photographs—this guide has excellent paintings—but there is another medium that routinely gets short shrift in field guides, and that is text. This guide is especially noteworthy for its text descriptions. And because the book covers a significant number of North American species, either because they have Holarctic distribution, or they occur in Europe as vagrants, I learned from the text some new field marks for American species that I am going to be trying out in the field. In Lesser Yellowlegs “secondaries and primaries are uniformly dark (secondaries and inner primaries at least finely spotted light on Greater)”. Horned Grebes in flight have “small white shoulder patch and white speculum confined to secondaries” while on Eared Grebes “white on speculum extends to inner primaries, and lacks white shoulder patch”. North American guides rarely find space to address such esoteric field marks.

—*Kent Fiala*