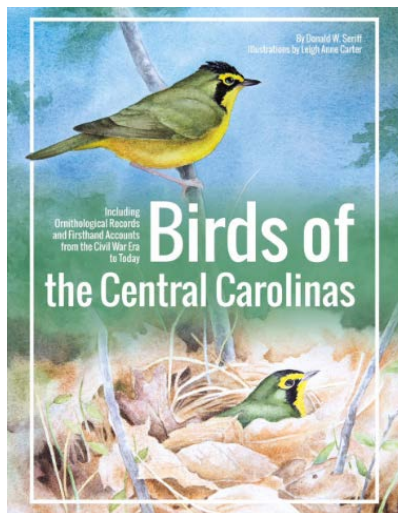


Birders' Book Review

Birds of the Central Carolinas

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Birds of the Central Carolinas
Donald W. Seriff with
illustrations by Leigh Ann Carter
ISBN 978-0692-05539-7
608 pages, casebound, 2018
\$45 www.meckbirds.org

In 1885 Russian Tsar Alexander III presented Empress Maria Feodorovna, his wife, with the first Fabergé Imperial Easter Egg. Over the next 32 years (with a short intermission due to the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905) Carl Fabergé delivered a bespoke egg every spring to the royal family. Each imperial egg impressed even the most discerning eye with unequalled craftsmanship and attention to detail. And that was simply the “cover”, for this first impression was only the beginning, as each egg contained something very special once opened. Be it a miniature coronation coach, swan, or palace, the detail contained within the shell was nothing less than stunning.

And what, pray tell, does this little history vignette have to do with birds, birding, or most specifically, book reviews of material pertaining to the Carolinas? Well, one might note that the 1911 Bay Tree Egg featured a tiny, singing songbird as its “surprise”, but I would like to make the case that *Birds of the Central Carolinas* by Donald W. Seriff, with illustrations by Leigh Ann Carter, in many ways parallels those bejeweled gifts of spring.

Birds of the Central Carolinas impresses right out of the box (or gift bag as the case may be). Of impressive heft and obvious quality, the Smyth sewn volume spans 608 pages and includes more than 400 photographs and 312 illustrations. An example of impressive detail, photographs taken in the Central Carolinas accompany nearly all species encountered within the book’s scope.

And like those eggs, the more closely one looks, the more impressive the details become. From the front and back inside covers, which show an 1877 map of downtown Charlotte overlaid with then-contemporary bird sightings, to jewels embedded within species accounts (did you know that a folk name for Tricolored Heron is “Lady of the Lake”?) surprises abound.

Beginning with a brief history of ornithology in the Carolinas, the book soon comes to the yolk of this fit-for-a-queen volume: species accounts listing records from the Civil War Era to present, each accompanied by a Breeding Bird Atlas grid map showing

breeding status in the Central Piedmont. Just skimming through to appreciate folk names and historical accounts promises an evening of enjoyment and answers questions including: “which breeding bird is called the *Quock*?”, and “what bird interrupted a 1913 Charlotte Hornets baseball game, potentially affecting the outcome?”

Some 538 pages into the work, the reader comes to material that includes a list of exotic species found near the Queen City, an aggregation of nearly 20 years of Christmas Bird Count data, a melancholy gallery of “lost birds”, photographic line-up of imperiled species, and then a recipe on how the reader can aide birds through creation of cavity nesting boxes (with plans) and even instructions on how to create the perfect homemade suet.

Although the title may suggest a more parochial interest, birders throughout the Carolinas and beyond are well-served by the detail, historical information, and beauty of this impressive work. And though the local bookshelf may sag with combined weight from various field guides and volumes promising “easy identification” and “better birding now”, *Birds of the Central Carolinas* deserves a prominent spot, or as this reviewer noted on a recent visit to a birder’s home, makes a great coffee table centerpiece as well. While that Fabergé egg may be out of financial reach of most, Don Seriff’s work will provide much the same pleasure at just a tiny fraction of the cost!

