

most of the carcass. A Common Grackle was frequently observed to prey on migrant passerines in this parkette in the spring of 1992 (Davidson 1994). Although White-throated Sparrows will eat dog food in captivity (J.B. Falls, pers. comm.), there are no reports of this species eating the remains of vertebrates in the wild.

The sparrow's use of this extraordinary food source may have been due to the lack of accessible sources of this species' usual types of food. The parkette is small (approximately 36 x 30 m) and only about half of the area is covered with grass, shrubs, or trees (Davidson 1994). It is also surrounded by office towers in excess of 50 storeys in height, which probably severely restrict movements of migrant birds out of the parkette. Given that there were approximately 10 to 30 migrant passerines in the parkette on days prior to observation (pers. obs.), the rate of consumption of insects, seed,

blossoms, and fruit by these and resident birds at that time of year could often have exceeded the rate of replenishment. Therefore, the small size of the park and its use by a relatively large number of stranded migrants probably led to a food shortage. This in turn would have forced the White-throated Sparrow to search for alternative sources of food and thus to scavenge the carcass of a member of its own species.

Literature cited

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Book Reviews

Finches and Sparrows: An Identification Guide. 1993. By *Peter Clement*, illustrated by *Alan Harris* and *John Davis*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. Hardcover, 500 pages, 73 colour plates and 281 range maps plus line drawings. \$76.95 Canadian.

This book is one of the latest in a series which includes such classics as *Seabirds*, *Shorebirds*, *Waterfowl*, *Swallows and Martins* and most recently *Warblers*. These extremely

detailed and comprehensive identification guides are syntheses of the current knowledge on each group from worldwide sources.

In *Finches and Sparrows*, 290

species in three mainly Old World families, Fringillidae, Estrildidae and Passeridae, are beautifully illustrated. Well-marked subspecies and morphs are also depicted. The 73 colour plates are grouped at the beginning of the book. On the opposite pages are colour-coded range maps and key descriptions of adult male, adult female and juvenile of each species. For more information, the reader is referred to the detailed species accounts on identification, plumages, subspecies, voice, habitat, behaviour, status, distribution, measurements and selected references. The artwork is magnificent. However, in a few species the shapes are off, for example, the Pine Grosbeaks on Plate 31 are too chunky and big-headed and their bills are too heavy.

The title of the book is somewhat misleading to North Americans because our native sparrows (subfamily Emberizinae) like the Song Sparrow and Vesper Sparrow are not included since they are not true sparrows. Our North American sparrows are in fact "buntings", but I'm not advocating changing the names! Clement reserves the name sparrow for the true sparrows in the family Passeridae such as the introduced House Sparrow and European Tree Sparrow. The book includes familiar winter finches such as Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Pine Grosbeak, redpolls, crossbills, etc. The three North American Rosy-

Finches that were re-split in 1993 by the American Ornithologists' Union are considered one species with the Old World forms. Also included are well-known cagebirds like the Java Sparrow and Zebra Finch, and other Eurasian, Australian and African finches. Therefore the book is useful for identifying escaped cagebirds.

There are a few minor errors. For example, the sexes of adult Common Redpolls of the nominate subspecies are not alike as stated on page 243, and Godfrey's *The Birds of Canada* is listed throughout the text as having been published in 1979 instead of 1966 (first edition) or 1986 (revised edition).

I would have preferred more information on plumage and molt. Species like the American Goldfinch that have a pre-breeding molt and distinctive breeding plumage are described in the same way as species that acquire their breeding dress through wear such as redpolls. In many cases, Clement does not distinguish clearly between juvenile (first covering of feathers before molt) and first year plumages.

It is difficult to recommend this expensive book to strictly North American birders because only 20 or so out of the 290 species are found here. Notwithstanding, this beautiful and brilliant reference work should be in the libraries of all well-travelled birders and those who yearn to be.

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Birds of Tropical America A watcher's introduction to behaviour, breeding and diversity. 1994. By *Steven Hilty*. Chapters Publishing Ltd., Shelburne, Vermont 05482. Softcover, 304 pp. \$12.95 Canadian.

While visiting a Toronto book store recently I was surprised to see this book, along with seven others of its kind, in the usual nature field guides section. The title immediately appealed to me; indeed, when I saw the name of the author with whom I was familiar because of a few path-crossings in several neotropical countries, I knew that I wanted it. For the past two decades Steve has led birding tours throughout South and Central America for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. His previous book, *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, has been praised by Robert Ridgely, author of the *Birds of Panama*, when he stated "No other book on neotropical birds comes close to this one".

Last week, fully armed with my new book, a tooth brush and shaver, I confidently headed into our local hospital prepared for abdominal surgery. After a few hours of regaining consciousness, I took up the book and was immediately transported once again to the thrill and excitement of tropical birding. The back cover title, I realized, was truthful when it said "The Book That Picks Up Where Field Guides Leave Off!"

After almost twenty-five years of birding the neotropics, during which time I achieved a fair list of birds (and field guides!), I have found that I wanted to learn more about the lives of those birds. I never got the answers to many questions that I had in the field, as a new bird sighting immediately after would cause me to forget.

The author confesses that, because tropical environments are enormously complex and dynamic, it is often difficult to answer even simple questions of those environments. With a Ph.D. in Zoology and his vast experience he answers most to my satisfaction as each page contains several thought-provoking items and loads of information.

I've often wondered why I have had many sightings of King Vultures that appeared as mere dots in the sky whereas I have seen five in a nearby tree on just one occasion? Why do they fly so high? Why were there so many more colourful large birds in the tropics? As the majority of tropical birds are dull in colour, why do drab, sparrow-sized antbirds never leave their dark, forest floor habitat? Answers to these and hundreds of others are contained in this book.

There are many enlightening statements regarding our North American migrants, as well .. One that surprised me concerned our Eastern Kingbird, fearless during his northern nesting period, as he easily scares off crows and blackbirds from his often exposed nest site, Hilty says that the kingbird pugnacity is traded for docile subordination to virtually all of its tropical relatives, and its territoriality is traded for a period of nomadic wandering. Gathering in large flocks, nervously acting like waxwings that wheel and turn on a dime, they plunge into giant fruiting trees. Humph! Their winters are spent as fruit-eaters!

In that I hope I have you hooked on getting this book to read, may I add a last personal and unforgettable observation regarding Eastern Kingbirds? On 1 April 1970, along with my long-time birding companion, Norm Chesterfield of Wheatley, Ontario, I stood at the top of Cerro Azul, a hill near Panama City, where, after stepping out of a bus, we gazed down in the valley below us to see a wide swath of Eastern Kingbirds flying north and extending in both directions as far as

the eye could see. This lucky observation had to take place between its crowded, Amazon basin winter home and our open, green areas where it chooses to nest.

This book has no glossy pages, only information-crammed text. I make no apologies for making this review sound more like a eulogy of Steve Hilty's work than a critique. It's excellent and the price is unlike that of other tropical bird books!

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Photo Quiz

by
Bob Curry

Most readers will quickly have identified last issue's quiz waterbird with the stout dagger-like bill as a loon. In addition to the fairly obvious overall impression, only grebes and loons have the feet set so far back on the body. Grebes have much less impressive bills and are more delicately proportioned especially in the head and neck area than is this bird. But which loon is it?

Red-throated Loon is a more finely built bird with a serpentine head and neck. Almost always the bill of Red-throated is more delicate with a straight culmen and a lower mandible which sweeps upward. This shape coupled with a head and bill which are held up at an angle to the horizontal lend it a unique profile

allowing for at least probable identification at great distances over the water. Moreover the white forepart of the throat and neck extend well onto the sides and the crown and nape are pale grey which give the entire head and neck an almost ghostly pale appearance. If all this is not enough, at close range such as our subject bird, the back is finely spotted with white on juvenile and winter plumaged Red-throated Loons.

Great care must be taken if one believes one has a small loon which may be a Pacific/Arctic. Hereafter, I will use the appellation "Pacific", the only one of this species-pair known to occur in Ontario. Some loons — probably juveniles — can appear