

BOOK REVIEW

The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds, John K. Terres. 1980. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1109 pages, \$65.

This extremely handsome and impressive volume which appeared at Christmastime undoubtedly captured the attention of most birders as a desirable addition to a personal library, but many may have hesitated in view of the considerable cost. Although this encyclopedia was available at substantial discount, i.e., \$40, in pre-publication sales, birders will be happy to know it is now offered at that price by the Birding Book Society or as a bonus book for only \$19.50. The Book of the Month Club also recently listed this volume as a bonus for \$15, plus shipping. Presumably a number of people will again be considering purchase.

John Terres, former editor of Audubon magazine, began work on the book in 1959 and its publication represents the culmination of twenty years of effort. The entire text has been written by him, a formidable undertaking and prodigious accomplishment for one writer, however skilled and experienced; but the author's list of acknowledgments is a veritable "Who's Who" in ornithology and therefore the single authorship while providing uniformity of style and presentation is not necessarily a limitation.

In what ways and for whom is the book useful or worthwhile? The value of any encyclopedia is determined in part by the scope of subject matter. Here, Mr. Terres has benefited from his twelve years of editorship of Audubon and has sensed what material will appeal to the lay reader as well as to professional naturalists and ornithologists and, especially, to all birders, casual and devoted alike. Topics run the gamut. There is thorough and very readable coverage of all the material which would be included in a good general text on ornithology. Of necessity, this subject matter may be distributed under a number of entries, e.g., evolution of birds is described in five or six places; but all are carefully cross-referenced so that the persistent reader can gain a satisfactory survey of the subject.

It seems to the reviewer that the major portion of the book is devoted to description, written and pictorial, and to identification and classification of North American bird families and species. Hence, it cannot fail to satisfy any birder fortunate enough to own it. There is as well much general information of popular interest, relevant historical and biographical matter, bird lore, meanings of bird names, a list of state birds, etc., plus definitions of practically every term used in ornithology. Coverage is almost too complete: certainly no specialized reference book need include a definition of "millimeter" or "drumstick." Also, it seems excessive to devote a long paragraph to Lucy Hunter Baird

whose sole claim to ornithological fame is that Lucy's Warbler was named in her honor when she was thirteen.

Bibliophiles who cannot resist a beautiful book will find the full price well justified by the bounty of illustrations, 875 excellent color photographs of nearly all North American nesting birds and 800 superb black and white drawings, among them a number by Margaret LaFarge who created the cover of Bird Observer. Nature photographers will enjoy browsing. A further major virtue of the book for the serious student of birds lies in the many in-text references to the very comprehensive bibliography which cites over 4000 sources, a superb guide to further study.

Mr. Terres has presented in clear and graceful prose a great many facts, well updated by the latest research, in a single volume so thoroughly cross-indexed that almost any approach will enable one to locate the particular piece of information sought.

In view of the immensity of the accomplishment, any criticism pales to insignificance, and most of the flaws seem to be mechanical ones. For example, there is a good amount of blank paper throughout the book, space which may have been set aside for illustrations that did not make it into print (page 268 is an extreme example). This reviewer found one instance where the information sought got lost in cross-references; i.e., looking up "leucism," the exact meaning of which term has always seemed elusive, led in a circle to "color of feathers, abnormal colors" to "albinism" to a literature reference without any definition. This was an unhappy test of the book for in reading through two half-columns of text on albinism, the reader met this tantalizing unfinished paragraph: "Records of albinism...in some N. American families of birds in descending order of their frequency were:" (p. 12). Failure to number pages xiv-xxiv may create momentary confusion for those who follow the table of contents and are referred to those pages. Also, the arrangement of the photographic credits will prove frustrating to any reader interested in knowing who the artist is. One must read through all page numbers listed after each name in a long list of credits, a somewhat discouraging process.

This book is not an essential addition to a well-stocked ornithological library but if yours consists of only field guides, this book would be an invaluable adjunct. This is a fine book to own and one that will provide much pleasure in browsing, substantial enlightenment upon careful perusal of the well-written text, a ready factual reference book, and possibly one of the most beautiful collections of bird photographs yet put together in a single volume.

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