

The first and most obvious is the pattern of the underparts. There is streaking there, yes — certainly this is not the finely-barred breast pattern of the adult — but the streaking is broad, blurry, hardly contrasting against the underlying ground color. This is typical of the immature Sharp-shinned. Young Cooper's Hawks *A. cooperii*, by comparison, tend to be much more distinctly marked: their streaks are blackish-brown, narrow, sharply defined, standing out against a whitish ground color. This character cannot be used to identify all young Cooper's/Sharp-shinneds, as some may show an intermediate chest-pattern, but it may be applied confidently to extreme individuals such as the one in the photograph.

Another good character here is shape-oriented: the "long-legged" look of the pictured bird. Actually, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned differ little in proportionate leg-length (although the Goshawk *A. gentilis* does appear short-legged for its bulk), but the Sharp-shinned has very *thin* legs, contributing to the illusion of length. Yet another point to note is the facial expression. The eye seems large for the size of the head and is centrally located in the face, lending a faint aura of (dare I say it?) "cuteness" to an otherwise fierce little face; on the Cooper's, by contrast, the eye appears proportionately smaller and is set farther forward, creating a more efficiently predatory look.

This immature **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was photographed near Phoenix, Arizona, by Joe DiStefano.

Letters

Our review of R. T. Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds*, Fourth Edition (*Continental Birdlife* 2 (1): 22-27) drew a remarkable response: literally dozens of cards and letters arrived, all expressing more or less agreement with what we had to say. The longest and most interesting letter came from Dr. Kenneth C. Parkes, one of the world's leading authorities on bird taxonomy, hybridization, plumages, molts, distribution, etc. Dr. Parkes brought up so many points of direct potential interest to field observers that we are, with permission, reprinting most of his comments here.

You have done a good job in pointing out the anatomical distortions in many of Peterson's plates. One of his worst faults has always been the placement of eyes. George Sutton pointed out to me years ago that birds have very definite species-specific "facial expressions" that are based in large part on the shape and position (as well as color) of the eye. Get the eye wrong, and no matter how good the rest of the painting may be, it just won't look real to somebody who knows the bird in life. It is almost impossible to visualize a skull, orbits, and complete eyeballs under the surface of a typical Peterson bird. His uncertainty as to where the eye should go is illustrated in (among many others) the plate of *Corvus* on p. 207. The eyes of the Fish Crow and "American" Crow have their anterior edges over the gape, whereas the eye of the "Northern" Raven is almost an eye-diameter farther back in the head, a difference that does not exist in the

birds themselves. See, for example, the photographs on pp. 124-125 of the new Terres *Encyclopedia of the North American Birds*, which also show how grossly wrong Peterson got the head and bill shape of the White-necked Raven.

Your review mentions the new "three-dimensional" effect in Peterson's paintings. His new artiness has caused him to forget the philosophy behind his original field guide, the principles of which constituted a genuine innovation in bird books. There were plenty of books with accurate close-up color portraits of North American birds. Peterson's idea was to show no more than necessary to be able to *identify the birds in the field*. Highlights, ruffled feathers, and even color itself were irrelevant in many cases, and often distracting. An example of the danger inherent in the new artiness can be found in the chickadees of p. 211 (which also have hopelessly bad eye positions and bill angles). The Black-capped and Carolina have the copyright Peterson arrows pointing at their crowns, presumably to point out the black rather than brown caps (although the arrow for the Boreal Chickadee points to the nape, not the crown). However, the arrow for the Black-capped points directly to a highlight on the crown, which is almost wholly lacking in the Carolina picture. A European birder could be forgiven the notion that Peterson meant to indicate that our two chickadees could be distinguished by glossy versus non-glossy caps, exactly as is the case in the Marsh Tit and Willow Tit of Europe (see plate 52 of the Peterson *et al.* field guide to European birds). I need hardly tell American birders that this is not a field mark for our chickadees.

Peterson is proud of the fact that the increased number of color plates in this edition has permitted a reduction in the average number of bird figures per plate (see his Introduction, pp. 7-8). All too often the opportunity provided by the additional space has been wasted. It is true that he has included some additional plumages, such as the winter American Goldfinch, embarrassingly and confusingly missing in the 1947 edition. Usually, however, he filled the space by enlarging rather than augmenting the birds shown; the outstanding example is the gigantic Belted Kingfishers of p. 187, possibly done this way in atonement for the painting of this species on plate 54 of the 1947 edition, perhaps the most grossly misproportioned figure in that edition. He could have used part of the space to portray an immature individual with a mixed-color breastband, a plumage not mentioned in the text but predominating among Belted Kingfishers seen in fall. Similarly, Peterson has added a small figure of a flying Yellow-bellied Sapsucker to the adult male and (fall) "immature" that were portrayed in 1947. In neither edition does he mention any difference between the sexes except throat color, red in males, white in females. Yet a substantial number of spring females, probably all first-year birds but nevertheless molted out of the brown "immature" plumage, *lack any red on the crown*. Among specimens examined, 6 of 28 females in "adult" plumage (21.4%) had black crowns. A head vignette of such a female would have been easy to include — there is plenty of space on that plate. It would have been more useful than the head of the "southern

form" of Hairy Woodpecker on p. 193 (*unlabelled* in the first printing of the book), which is not mentioned in the text. Few birds become as dirty as woodpeckers between molts, and I predict a rash of records of "southern" Hairy Woodpeckers invading the northern states late in the winter when the local birds are well sooted.

The case of the two woodpeckers, the sapsucker and the Hairy, brings up an important point. I don't think even Roger Peterson realizes how literally the beginning birdwatcher takes his field guide. As those of us who answer written or telephoned bird questions from the public know well, if there is a discrepancy between the bird and the picture in "Peterson", there is something the matter with the bird, or rather, it is *not* the species in the picture, but some rare visitor. A sapsucker-like bird with a black cap *can't* be a female Yellow-bellied, because *Peterson* says the female is just like the male except for having a white throat, and the male has a red cap.

Needless to say, the abridgment of the text into plate captions has made impossible the mention of plumage variants (whether individual, seasonal, or geographic), but the increased plate space available would have permitted the addition of many useful figures or part figures to supplement those used. Many more birders will see male *Carpodacus* finches in the brighter red worn plumage of summer than will see the "bridled" form of "Thin-billed" Murre, of which Peterson gives a full figure. He takes the space for a head vignette of the extinct Labrador Duck, but shows male "eclipse" plumages for only the Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser (plus, of course, the homologous "winter" plumages of the Oldsquaw and Ruddy Duck). The Least Bittern is our only strongly sexually dimorphic heron, but Peterson chose to show only an adult male, along with the melanistic "Cory's" color phase, which hasn't been seen since 1928 (*fide* Palmer). Even the adult male is merely labeled "typical", with no indication of its sex or age (juveniles are quite different in color and pattern).

One could go on and on documenting the lost opportunities and the badly painted birds. It is hardly a secret that Peterson adopted the "plate-caption" text format in response to the highly successful Robbins guide; it is a pity that he did not, instead, choose to *expand* the text, which was far superior to that of the Robbins guide, and to augment rather than merely magnify and "pretty up" the bird figures.

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