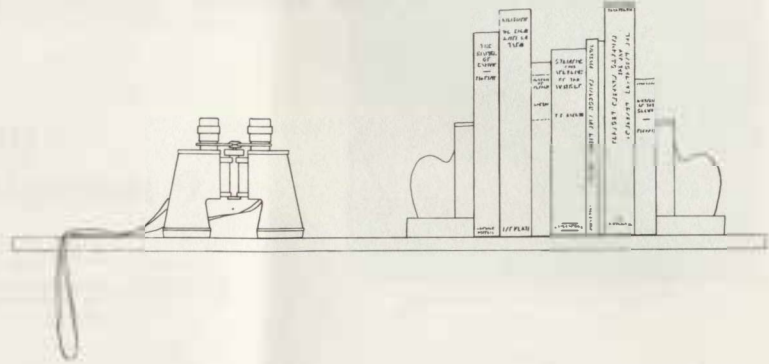


Reviews

Edited by

ELAINE COOK



Rare Birds of the West Coast — Don Roberson. 1980. Pacific Grove, California: Woodcock Publications. xxxii + 496 pp., 10 color plates, photos, drawings, maps, graphs. \$24.95 plus \$1.50 shipping.

Publisher's address:
Woodcock Publications
P.O. Box 985
Pacific Grove, CA 93950

BEGINNING IN THE early 1960's, field ornithology along the west coast of North America was "turned on its ear" by rapid advancements in our knowledge of bird distribution and techniques of field identification. During this period the number of active observers was rapidly increasing all along the West Coast, and during the 1960's and 1970's there was a phenomenal increase in the number of rare birds reported from Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California. This was not only the result of the increase in observer numbers and the bettering of field identification skills, but also of the "discovery" of where and when to look for rare birds. It was not until this time that such areas as the western Aleutians, a number of coastal locales characterized by isolated clumps of vegetation, California's offshore islands, and the isolated water bodies and desert oases of eastern Washington, Oregon, and, especially, California were covered more extensively.

Coming out of this "revolution" in West Coast birding is Don Roberson's new book, *Rare Birds of the West Coast*. Modeled after J.T.R. Sharrock's *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland*, this book has an annotated text with maps, graphs, and a generous supply of documenting photographs for all 288 species of "rarities" that have occurred in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California through 1979. In this book, a "Rarity" is defined (although there are a number of exceptions) as a species which has been averaging fewer than four records per year in a given state or province and, in the case of Alaska, any Eurasian species not covered adequately by the standard North American field guides. In addition, the author discusses the patterns and theories of vagrancy and, importantly, gives rather extensive notes and essays on the field identification of many of the tougher species. Also included are several color plates,

largely of Eurasian species, done by a number of artists.

Here is a single volume which gives the status and distribution of every rarity that has occurred on the West Coast. It contains much valuable information for the field ornithologist interested in bird distribution, and for all birders interested in rare birds in general and in bettering their field identification skills past the "field guide stage." For these reasons, not only will observers living on the West Coast and those contemplating visiting the area find this book valuable, but so will those living in the remainder of North America and elsewhere.

Don Roberson has produced a compilation of identification knowledge from several of the top birders from the West Coast. In general, his presentations are excellent. However, there are also some inaccuracies. The author rightly professes that not all the information he presents is fool-proof; still, a problem that does crop up in a number of instances in the book is Roberson's inclusion of identification criteria based only on very limited field or museum experience with the species. Inaccuracies have resulted. Examples of this can be found in the over-simplified discussion of the differences between nominate Manx Shearwater and "Newell's" Shearwater, and in the statement that Mourning Warbler is more apt to forage above ground away from dense cover than is MacGillivray's. It should be said, again, that *most* of what is written on field identification in this book is excellent.

To assist in the discussion of field identification problems, ten color plates are included which depict some 100 species. Painted by five different artists, their overall quality, accuracy, and usefulness vary greatly. Some are very good (i.e. waterfowl and pipits), others are likely good only for gaining an impression of a species' general appearance, while a few are actually misleading.

The theories on vagrancy summarized by the author are both interesting and enlightening. A number of references to excellent journal articles on the subject are cited. Again, in a significant number of cases, (e.g. Manx Shearwater, Northern Three-toed Woodpecker, Wood Warbler), Roberson has over-stated the facts and has described a "pattern" of records or given theories for the species' occurrence without sufficient supportive evidence. The author's proposed migration pattern in Stilt Sandpiper that explains the species being a rarity only in Oregon is absurd (relative sparseness of observer coverage there is more likely the cause). In addition, the term "overshoot" is probably not appropriate for many of the rare visitors to the western Aleutians as they breed still farther to the north in Siberia.

What may very well be the biggest "problem" with this book is the over-abundance of grammatical and typographical mistakes. These take the form of errors in date, local place names, county names, state names, and location of dots denoting record locations on the state maps. A number of references cited by Roberson in the main text are not found in the "literature cited" section in the appendix. Given the monumental task of gathering such a volume of data for a book like this, there are bound to be scattered errors in the final edition of any such undertaking; however, the number present in *Rare Birds of the West Coast* is excessive. While these many errors do not actually take away from the reader's appreciation for the overall number and pattern of records of rare birds, they will cause problems for the researcher who wishes to cite *specific* records. It is recommended that if one wishes to use specific records found in *Rare Birds of the West Coast*, one should double check the data in other sources, such as *American Birds*.

A number of inaccurate or unsubstantiated claims as to the local status of species also exist. Examples would include the statement that "white-vented" Manx Shearwater may be more likely to occur off California from June-September than the "dark-vented" Manx and that *P. p. puffinus* is definitely the "white-vented" form occurring. that Stilt Sandpiper "occasionally" winters in Southern California away from the Salton Sea (there is only one such record), and that there is no record of a wintering McCown's Longspur for the coast (there is one).

While the author properly indicates that state records committees have not yet voted on some records he includes in his book, he may still have included records for which there was particularly little support, even from the actual observer of the sighting as is the case with the

Northern Three-toed Woodpecker in California. In other instances, such as with the September 1978 California Rufous-necked Stint (many believe it was a Semipalmated Sandpiper) and the May 1980 Attu Is., Alaska, "Common" Reed Bunting (some believe it was a Pallas' and others think it best to leave it unidentified) there are no statements to the effect that the identifications are publicly known to be very controversial. In the case of the Reed Bunting, Roberson actually discusses the *subspecies* involved. This, I believe, is one of several cases where the author needlessly puts himself "out on a limb." Roberson should have followed a more cautious course. On the other hand, the book's Appendix C, "Selected Reports Not Used", was a good idea and is presented well.

A more minor problem in this book involves the graphing of a "typical" year's records for some species instead of all records for the species. For example, in the Black-and-White Warbler one may get the impression from the graph that the species is unrecorded in California in February and March and nearly so in January, which is far from correct. In such cases it would have been better to change the scale to accommodate all records.

Like the author, I, too, enjoy seeing photographs of rarities. Roberson was correct in only including photos of actual West Coast rarities, and his generous inclusion of photos is one of the more appealing aspects of the book. My only complaint with the photos is the inclusion of those of specimens (not needed, unless used in conjunction with a discussion on identification) and those of very questionable quality. There comes a point when the author's statement, "any photo is better than no photo," does not hold true. Some photos may very well have suffered unexpectedly in the printing of the book, yet some were probably too poor from the start to appear (e.g. Olive-backed Pipit).

Two photos in the book appear to be misidentified. The Oregon Least Tern is likely being accompanied by two Common Terns, definitely not by Forster's. The Oregon "Black-headed" Gull shows a white undersurface to the primaries and may well be only a worn Bonaparte's.

Indeed, as this review comes to a close it appears as though a goodly amount of emphasis has been placed on what I see to be drawbacks to *Rare Birds of the West Coast*. This is *not* meant to say that this is not a very good book worth owning. It is only meant to point out these drawbacks to the owner of the book. It is an excellent sourcebook for the records of every "rarity" that has occurred in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California, it is accompanied by a plethora of enjoyable rarity photos, and the identification sections are extremely valuable. Buy it. — *Paul Lehman*

The Complete Birds of the World — Michael Walters. 1980. North Pomfret, Vermont: David & Charles. 340 + xii pp. \$35.00.

Publisher's address:
David & Charles
North Pomfret, VT 05053

WITHIN THE LAST DECADE, numerous attempts at world bird checklists have been published. This one caught my eye because of the ambitious title and because several reviewers mentioned it in a favorable vein. But now that I have looked carefully at the book, I can only conclude that those reviewers did not do the same. *The Complete Birds of the World* is provably full of inaccuracies and arguably an insult to the intelligence of American readers.

To deal with factual errors first: the basic idea and format are not bad. The book proposes to list every extant or recent bird species, stating for each the Latin name, standard English name, distribution, and where known the habitat, food, nest site, clutch size, incubation period and fledging period, all of the latter information being presented in telegraphic style. This would be a valuable one-volume reference source if the information were reliable . . . but once you've taken a long look at this book, you won't trust it as far as you can throw your binoculars.

Consider the range descriptions. Admittedly this is a difficult subject, and some leeway should be allowed, but the number and magnitude of errors in this book are appalling. Here is a small sample from the dozens of errors I found in a few minutes of browsing. The Whip-poor-

will *Caprimulgus vociferus* is listed as inhabiting "Central America and south-western USA" (what about all those in eastern North America?); the Spot-tailed Nightjar *C. maculicaudus* is granted "Scattered localities in tropical South America" (but actually occurs north to Mexico). Both Great Swallow-tailed Swift *Panyptila sanctihieronymi* and Black-capped Swallow *Notiochelidon pileata* are stated to be restricted to Guatemala, but both are actually more widespread. The ranges of two nightingale-thrushes, Russet *Catharus occidentalis* and Ruddy-capped *C. franzi*, are mangled beyond comprehension, and the Veery *C. fuscescens* is accused of breeding in Central America. Neither Spotted Rail *Pardirallus maculatus* nor Yellow-breasted Crake *Porzana flaviventer* is acknowledged to occur in Mexico. Are these errors too minor to mention? Well, Little Gull *Larus minutus* is not listed as occurring in the New World; for that matter, neither is Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. Ridiculous! These are all cases where the correct information was easily available; how good are the data for more remote regions of the world?

Other aspects of the information content are just as bad. The book claims to list every species, including those of dubious validity, but there is no mention of Chilean Skua *Catharacta chilensis* or Socorro Dove *Zenaida graysoni*. Habitat descriptions are usually missing; when present, they may be vague or misleading: Yellow Rail *Coturnicops noveboracensis* is attributed to "meadows and ravines," while the Band-backed Wren *Campylorhynchus zonatus* of tropical rain forests is said to inhabit "dry forest and clearings." Why bother to fake this sort of information?

You may have guessed by now that I am irritated by this book. I am; what finally set me off was the way the book's author compounds ignorance with arrogance in the matter of English names. Of course this subject invites petty arguments, but *standardization* of English names is clearly to be desired. We have a good start on standardized names in the Western Hemisphere — thanks to the A.O.U. north of the border and the work of Eisenmann and Meyer de Schauensee on Neotropical species — but this book's British author, Michael Walters, blithely ignores these established names whenever he chooses. We could allow for British preference for those species that occur on both sides of the Atlantic, but such is not the case with our Dusky Flycatcher *Empidonax oberholseri*: why bring back the confusing older name of "Wright's Flycatcher?" And what can be the whimsical reasons for changing *Larus californicus* to "Californian Gull," or *Myiarchus cinerascens* to "Ashy-throated Flycatcher?" Ignoring taxonomic fact as well as correct names, Walters resurrects the "Black-eared Bushtit," and then calls *Psaltriparus minimus* the "Coast Bushtit."

Walters seems to dislike group names. In his book the Brush-Finches of the genus *Atlapetes* are just called "finches," the Nightingale-Thrushes of *Catharus* are simply "thrushes," despite the fact that we find these names useful to distinguish them from the many other finches and thrushes. (Brevity may be his aim, but if so he misses the mark when he calls *Parotia carolae* "Queen Carola of Saxony's Six-plumed Bird of Paradise" — no kidding!) The Ground-Doves get the worst treatment. The Plain-breasted Ground-Dove *Columbina minuta* is called "Grey Ground Dove;" the Ruddy Ground-Dove *C. talpacoti* is given *three* alternative names, all incorrect: "Ruddy Dove, Stone Dove, Cinnamon Dove." And *C. passerina* — which we have called a Ground Dove for generations, and for which the modified name of Common Ground-Dove is perfectly acceptable — is called "Rosy Dove" in this book. Come now, Mr. Walters, how would you like it if we came over to Britain and renamed your Common Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* the "Ungainly Plover," or your Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* the "Dirt-colored Thrush?" There are some ornithologists over here in the Colonies nowadays, and they are not likely to be impressed by nomenclatural meddling from the Mother Country... especially not in a work so shot full of errors as this one. — *Kenn Kaufman*

Finding Birds Around the World — Peter Alden and John Gooders. 1981. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company. xxxviii + 683 pp., maps. \$17.95.

Publisher's address:
Houghton Mifflin Co.
2 Park Street
Boston, MA 02107

THIS BOOK could be of use to almost anyone interested in birds who is planning a trip anywhere in the world. It will not tell anyone anything new about their own home areas, nor is it designed to do so. What it is designed to do is provide enough information to allow the neophyte or professional ornithologist alike to "get started" in almost any country in the world. As noted by Roger Tory Peterson in the Foreword, "this book is certainly not the last word about every region but it is certainly the first word in print about many tropical areas." As such it should be welcomed by the casual birder, scientist, graduate student, almost anyone that is going someplace new and hasn't the slightest idea what to expect.

The format is straightforward. Each of 111 chapters details a region — city, national park, remote jungle lodge — beginning in the Americas and gradually proceeding eastward, ending with Australia, the western Pacific and New Zealand. For each chapter an introduction of five hundred words or so highlights the ornithological attraction, climate, vegetation, facilities, sights to see (or avoid), and frustrations to be encountered. This is followed by a black-and-white sketch map and a slightly abridged checklist for the region. The maps are drawn and labeled free-hand in a "no-frills" style that may seem crude to those accustomed to slick, glossy, full-color products that emphasize style more than content. Don't be misled. The maps, along with the checklists, are the "heart" of the book and are an excellent and eminently usable distillation of simplicity, clarity and necessary detail. The checklists include 80-90 per cent of the species found in each region discussed, or essentially all of the species the temporary visitor is likely to encounter. Because in the majority of cases the area lists have been assembled with the aid of contributors who have extensive knowledge of the areas, the lists are remarkably trustworthy. Symbols detailing abundance, visibility, status and elevation greatly enhance the value of the lists.

In an introductory section the prospective traveler is given a variety of wry advice on subjects ranging from hotels, tours, bookings and transportation to health and what to wear or take along on trips. Much of the advice in these sections may seem like common sense, and mostly it is, but it is all too often forgotten or ignored. It is worth reading. Also in the introduction one finds four continental maps that show the approximate locations of the areas discussed in detail in the chapters that follow. These maps (also sketched free hand) are rather small and cluttered and might have been more accessible if placed on the inside of the front and back covers.

In a book of world scope such as this, one inevitably has to deal with the many nuances of global taxonomy, inappropriate names and duplication of common bird names from region to region (for example, as noted by the authors, there is a White-necked Raven in Africa and one in the Americas). To this end the authors have juggled a certain number of common names or coined new ones in order to make a lot of fuzziness fit into place. Unlike many bird guides that impose their personal prejudices upon the unsuspecting reader and then leave him to his own devices to sort out the bewildering muddle of unfamiliar names, the authors of this book have done a service to the reader by preparing an extensive taxonomic cross-index. The index lists common names, alternate names and scientific names. Easy entry into the taxonomic index is facilitated by an adjacent alphabetical index. The taxonomic index makes the text and checklists infinitely more credible and verifiable and may perhaps aid in the advancement of a non-trivial set of common names for the birds of the world. A regionalized bibliography in the rear of the book will also be of considerable use to those readers that need to become acquainted with general guides and checklists that are available.

In a book of such global scope, one is prompted to ask whether it is possible to actually plan

a holiday to a distant land based solely on the information in this book. Honestly, the answer is probably no, because with rare exceptions the information is not complete enough and too few localities are discussed within each country. Also, at a thick 683 pages, it just might be a little bulky for most weight-conscious travelers to carry along. **Finding Birds** is nonetheless the first of its kind, a world travel guide for birders; it details information on a wealth of localities heretofore never mentioned in print, and it is written in a light-hearted, highly readable style by two premier globe-trotting members of the birding jet set. It is a gold mine of travel tips, maps and other hard-to-obtain information. Even if you never go anywhere it will provide hours of vicarious armchair traveling, and if you do go somewhere, it just might save you grief and some money. — *Steve Hilty*

Birds of Southern California: Status and Distribution — Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn. 1981. Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles Audubon Society. viii + 408 pp., line drawings by Lee Jones, bar-graphs, maps. \$18.95.

Publisher's address:
Los Angeles Audubon Society
7377 Santa Monica Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90046

IT SEEMS that everything done in Southern California is done with great intensity. Certainly the birding is. Members of the hard-core corps dash about the varied landscape at all seasons, sometimes in single-minded search of Rare Birds but more often (fortunately) with attention to the more regularly occurring species as well. Their investigations have so radically and continuously altered what was known of the Southern California birdlife that it had become difficult for most birders to keep track of exactly what was known. Clearly there was a need for a reliable reference source on the subject.

That need has now been met with the publication of this authoritative work. The authors, Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn, rank among North America's leading field ornithologists; the depth of their experience, knowledge and understanding of their region's birdlife is evident on every page.

Following a worthwhile series of introductory chapters (on such general topics as faunal regions, habitats, taxonomy, and population trends), the main body of the book uses a format that allows for both quick reference and thorough treatment. It leads off with a section of bar-graphs to show seasonal status; each species (or, in some cases, each recognizable subspecies) may be graphed up to four times to indicate different timing of occurrence in different regions of Southern California. The text account for each species begins with a brief summarizing paragraph, followed by a variable amount of clarifying detail — from a few lines to a page or more, depending on the complexity of the species' distribution and seasonal status. This is perhaps the point at which Garrett and Dunn most clearly display their expertise: they are not generalizing or guessing; all the patterns they describe are backed up with specific dates and localities. And yet the wealth of detail never becomes overwhelming or confusing, because the authors know when (and how) to summarize their information. For best treatment of some species with complicated breeding ranges not easily described in words, there is a series of range maps in the back of the book. The combination of bar-graphs, maps and detailed text guarantees that the user will never be in doubt as to the significance of his or her own observations in Southern California.

One other manifestation of the authors' expertise deserves to be mentioned. Even though Kimball and Jon had had exhaustive field experience throughout their region and knew as much as anyone about the subject, they wisely chose to have all the draft material for the book reviewed for accuracy by a number of other knowledgeable persons. We hope that someday all bird book authors will practice the same level of scholarship — and produce books as thorough and reliable as this one. — *K.K.*

CORRECTIONS TO GULL PAPER

Please note the following errata to a paper published recently in this journal (Weber, J. W., 1981. The *Larus* gulls of the Pacific Northwest's interior, with taxonomic comments on several forms. Part II. *C. B.* 2 (3): 74-91). These corrections were sent by the author prior to publication, but we inadvertently failed to make the necessary changes. Our apologies to Mr. Weber.

- Page 80, paragraph 1, line 16: insert the phrase "(also flesh-footed)" after "occidentalis"
- Page 82, paragraph 1, line 8: "its tips" should read "its wing tips"
- Page 82, paragraph 2, line 2: replace "mitigates" by "militates"
- Page 82, paragraph 2, lines 5 and 6; phrase in parentheses should read "in which the evidence suggests convergence through time"
- Page 88, second line from bottom: "Tables 3 and 4" should read "Tables 3, 4, and 5"
- Page 90: reference to Dement'ev *et al.* is to Vol. 3; "Garden City" should be "Garden City, New York" in reference to Bull
- Page 91: reference to Selander is to Vol. I of Farner and King; delete reference to Vaurie

We also received the following comments from Jeff Gilligan of Portland, Oregon:

I am writing in regard to the recently published article by Mr. John Weber concerning the *Larus* gulls in the interior of the Pacific Northwest (Continental Birdlife. Vol. 2, No. 3). I enjoyed the erudite discussion regarding their status in eastern Washington and Idaho. I am however totally appalled by the inaccurate reference on page 88 regarding their status in Oregon. Mr. Weber states that "Because of their occurrence in eastern Washington or Idaho, it is possible that one or more of the following has been overlooked in eastern Oregon: *hyperboreus*, *glaucescens*, *argentatus*, *thayeri*, *canus*, *sabini*, *tridactyla*, and perhaps *glaucoides*." All of these species except for *thayeri*, *tridactyla*, and *glaucoides* have been well established to occur east of the Cascade Mts. in Oregon. There is even a published report of *tridactyla* in "American Birds". The other species noted in eastern Oregon are represented in "Oregon Birds" and "American Birds". *Glaucescens* is even fairly common along the Columbia River east of the Cascade Mts., and has been found to breed at one location in recent years. It would require an article of significant length to correct the misinformation regarding these gulls in eastern Oregon. Readers are more appropriately referred to the forthcoming book regarding the status and distribution of Oregon birds to be published by the Portland Audubon Society.