



Books For Banders

"SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW"

Edited By Mabel Gillespie



We are indebted to Emil Berger for the loan of his copy of "Biological Techniques" by Jens W. Knudsen, associate professor of biology at Pacific Lutheran University, and published by Harper and Row. This volume contains the sort of information that banders might seldom need, but occasionally might want desperately and not know where to find.

The preface opens with these remarks: "This book has been written as a textbook for courses in biological techniques or museum techniques, and to meet the needs of those who are involved in working with natural history material. Descriptions of techniques for field study, collection, preservation, illustration, and the like, are usually unavailable to the student and often seem to be wanting altogether. All too frequently neither teachers nor students can save or work with specimens that are available to them, because they lack information on preservation, for example... Thus amateur naturalists ... who lack specialized equipment will find this work extremely useful."

The chapters deal with general collection sites and techniques, algae, fungi, mosses and liverworts, higher plants, and each of the animal phyla. Obviously the chapter of interest to EBBA members is the one on birds. "Freshly killed bird specimens are ... always available to the alert bird student. Birds killed by striking windows or by automobiles need not be wasted." But, federal and state permits must be obtained for legal possession even of road kills, and for mounting and preserving protected species. For instance, I can stop when I see a dead bird in the road, look for a possible band, and cast it to the side of the road, but without proper permits I can't take it to the school biology teacher for class use, nor can such teacher give a demonstration of preserving technique unless he possesses the proper permits.

For a bander interested in preserving either road kills or legally shot game birds and possessed of the required permits, the author includes detailed and illustrated descriptions of procedures.

The chapter on scientific illustration contains much of value. Field notes may often be enhanced by a sketch however crude. A paper, read or printed, can lend accuracy or emphasis through the use of drawings. Line cuts and halftone engravings are described. (Editor Frazier explains that the photo-offset process is used in EBBA News. Most black and white drawings can be reproduced; line drawings are most satisfactory. Through use of halftones, photographs, even color prints, can be reproduced.)

In Chapter 1 there is a discussion on making color notes. Ridgway is cited as having produced the best color charts, but not only is his publication out of print, but it is too bulky for field use. There are difficulties involved with color photography. The author suggests as the simplest and most direct method the use of water color paints. A crude sketch of the specimen is made, and then one experiments with paint mixtures, holding the sample next to the specimen. When the correct shade is found, a circle is drawn around it and it is numbered to correspond to the same number placed in the right position on the sketch. One should not color the sketch.

The appendix includes sections on "Some Display Methods", on "Slide Making", on "Reagents and Solutions", and on "Narcotizing Agents". It seems that the section on reagents and solutions would have more value if it specified how and why each chemical mixture should be used.

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Sooner or later many of us take a birdman's holiday in Mexico where 970 species of birds have been recorded. Some of this number were accidents, and a good number are familiar North American birds spending the winter, but there remains a tempting number of exotic species to tempt the watcher. For some time there have been rumors of a book on Mexican birds in the Peterson series. Meanwhile, there is a very satisfactory publication called "Finding Birds in Mexico", written by Ernest Preston Edwards, published by the author, and available in a paperback edition in a second, enlarged edition (from the author, at Sweet Briar, Virginia). This book was loaned for review by Frank Frazier.

Section I is devoted "to a discussion of the regions and subregions of Mexico". Section II "consists of a list, in alphabetical order, of 68 Mexican localities, with detailed discussions of 66 of them. These discussions include a general characterization of the area, then lists of birds to be expected in various habitats of the area." "Section III consists of a list of all species of birds now existing which are known to have been reliably recorded in Mexico more than twice. The English common name of the bird is first listed, followed by the Mexican common name and scientific name... If the species does not occur in the U.S.A. its common name is printed in capital letters, and a very brief characterization is added to the listing, or an illustration is cited, for assistance in field identification." However, the visitor from Northeastern U.S. unfamiliar with birds of the southwest, would need either or both of the Peterson Field Guides, or "Birds of North America" by Robbins et al., or two volumes of the Pough trilogy. For instance, in the Edwards guide, eight species of kites are listed. Four of these occur in the south and southwest of the U.S. Therefore, descriptions are given only of the four species native to Mexico alone. Yet the bird watcher from the northeast might be unfamiliar with any species of kite.

One unique aspect of this guide is the ecological grouping of bird species. A description of the terrain in a given region is followed by a list of the species the watcher may expect to encounter thereabouts. There are suggestions as to overnight accommodations, recommended routes, advice as to where to look for certain species along each route, and areas and activities to avoid.

For example, consider the suggestions for birding around the city of Guaymas in the state of Sonora. This city, located on the eastern shore of the Gulf of California, represents a "combination of the land birds of southern Arizona with the water birds and shore birds of southern California or northern Baja California. There are almost none of the Mexican specialties which one can see further south, but there are many species here which enter the United States only in the extreme southwestern tier of states." The text mentions routes to take from the city, places to pull off the road and search, and descriptions of the countryside. I like particularly one suggestion which leads the tourist across a viaduct and railroad tracks to a point where he can walk out toward the mud flats along the bay but "we recommend not going into the mud".

Several illustrators have contributed to the pages of illustrations. These include ~~online~~ drawings of exotic species such as the sun-bittern, potoo, jacamar, antbird, manakin, etc.; also of some birds of prey with the tail patterns inked in. There are drawings in more detail of other distinctive tails, including those of the trogons and the quetzal. Several pages are crowded with black, white and gray drawings of various species, and of the heads of woodpeckers and creepers. Finally, there are several pages showing many species in full color.

I have greatly enjoyed my easy-chair vicarious birding in Mexico.

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One of our fellow banders, Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, is the author of "The Lovely and the Wild" published by McGraw-Hill in 1968. Grace C. Meleney made her copy available for review.

Mrs. Lawrence's narrative is in two parts. In three brief chapters of the first part she tells of her childhood home in Sweden in a rural area with sweeping views. Here there was a feeding place for birds and daily opportunities for observing wildlife. The death of her father when she was seventeen ended this delightful pastoral life, leaving her with a dream that was to be realized many years later when, now living in Canada and married, she and her husband settled in the wilderness nearly 200 miles west of Ottawa. Here she started her bird observations with, at first, only the aid of Chester Reed's bird guides.

Correspondence with P.A. Taverner, curator of birds at the National Museum of Canada, led her to follow his suggestion to take up bird banding. She speaks disparagingly of a total of slightly more than 25,000

birds banded. However, though she heard from less than a dozen recovered elsewhere, and caught only a couple of "foreign" birds, the use of bands proved invaluable in her study of bird behavior.

The second part of the book opens with a chapter called "A Lesson in Tolerance". After suffering remorse for having shot a red squirrel which was proving a nuisance (what squirrel doesn't?) she achieved rapprochement with a female red squirrel and a respect for the balance of nature. She speaks of the "lard pudding" made from rolled oats, fat and water, and enjoyed by all the wild creatures "from black bears to Chipping Sparrows".

Then there is a delightful chapter on chickadees. One banded bird of this species lived to be nine years old, and there are a few other nine year records, but the average span is "one, two, rarely three years". The author was curious to know what all the little chickadee gestures meant, and gradually learned how to observe "and decode the mysteries".

She writes of the "nomadic tribes", of the miracle of returning after a migration interval, of the nestings of various species, and finally of the great disaster in 1956 when nearly the whole month of May featured snow and freezing weather after spring migrants had arrived. And before populations could recover the spread of civilization began to threaten the wilderness.

This is a book you must read yourselves to appreciate the beauty of philosophy and the excellence of English usage. The subject matter would have been fascinating in plain narrative language. The author makes of it a poetic song. The book is pleasantly illustrated with drawings by Glen Loates. And it is most appropriately dedicated to M.M.N. who is, of course, Margaret Morse Nice.

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Your book corner editor is now living far from libraries that contain scientific material. You will have noticed that the three books considered in this issue were all leaned for that purpose. Will other EBBA members either help with loans or, far better, send their own impressions of books or articles that have favorably impressed them? The purpose of this feature is not to achieve a proper and critical type of reviewing, but to call to the attention of banders any publications that may be of interest or value to them.

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