

ANNOUNCEMENT

A HOME STUDY COURSE IN ORNITHOLOGY

BY

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The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has recently announced a home study course in bird biology entitled Seminars in Ornithology, which should be of interest to every birdbander, no matter how experienced in the field, who has never had a formal college-level course in ornithology. That includes most of us.

The course is the result of 10 years of planning and writing by O. Sewall Pettingill, Jr., and a staff of professional collaborators, and involved the investment of more than \$70,000, some of which funds were provided by an industrial grant.

The course consists of nine seminars which may be completed at the student's own pace; each seminar is studied and a set of quiz sheets are to be returned to Cornell before the next seminar is studied. Corrected quiz sheets are returned. Students who complete the entire course satisfactorily receive a certificate from the Laboratory.

The course is \$11.00 per seminar (the final lesson is free) which can be paid per seminar, or in advance. If paid in advance, the total cost is \$88. Per seminar the cost is \$95 (with registration fee). There is a 10% discount to Laboratory members.

The seminars are copiously illustrated and the subjects of each seminar are: 1. A Preview of Birds, 2. The External Bird, 3. Birds in the Earthly Environment, 4. Birds on the Move, 5. The Internal Bird [Pt.1], 6. The Internal Bird [Pt.2], 7. Behavior of Birds, 8. Birds from Nests to Flight, 9. Birds and you.

The undersigned bought this course and completed a few lessons before releasing this announcement in EBBA News. So from personal experience, I heartily recommend this course to all EBBA News readers. Your money will be well invested, believe me! When you diligently study each Seminar, your lectures and net-lane talks will take on new meaning, because you'll know what you are talking about, instead of grasping at straws. Besides, there will be few questions from your audience which you will not be able to answer.

Good luck! Fred Schaeffer, Ed.

A BANDER'S LIBRARY
By Robert P. Yunick

The beginning bander is faced with a multitude of decisions on where to spend most advantageously his limited funds on a seemingly limitless list of equipment, gadgets, books, etc. To assist newcomers in selecting a bander's "identification library", I have listed below a number of recommendations for consideration. The term "identification" is intended to cover in the broadest sense matters of specific identification, determination of age and sex, the use of geographical distribution data, and general banding skill improvements which make one a more knowledgeable identifier of passerines in the hand. The texts that comprise the list are ones which I have found useful in various ways. In no way have I intended to be a critical reviewer of each of these sources.

I have classified these recommendations into two groups: A. Essential to have, and B., Those which are nice to have if one can afford them. Lastly, the important matter of cost is considered.

A. Essential to have.

1. A Manual for the Identification of Birds of Minnesota and Neighboring States by T.S. Roberts, \$4.50, 293pp., University of Minn., Press., Minneapolis, Minn., 1955. This soft cover, rugged guide excels in providing plumage details, molt data mostly from Dwight, measurements and interesting summaries of the various avian families. The text is written in the form of a key. Because of a lack of colored illustrations, this text finds its greatest utility in confirming species identification after once having consulted Peterson or Robbins, *et al.*, or in confirming details on age or sex plumage characteristics. Its combined compactness and detail are without peer.
2. Birds of North America - A Guide to Field Identification by C.S. Robbins, B. Bruun, H.S. Zim, and A. Singer, \$5.95 in hard cover or \$3.95 in soft cover, 340pp., Golden Press, New York, 1966. This guide serves front-line duty on the majority of species identification problems. Its compactness, coverage of all North America, distribution maps and excellent artwork make it an extremely valuable guide. In conjunction with Peterson it is usually the first text sought for a species confirmation. The soft cover version has taken well to rugged field use.
3. A Field Guide to the Birds (Eastern) by R. T. Peterson, \$5.95 in hard cover or \$3.95 in soft cover, 254pp., Houghton-Mifflin, Boston 1947. My well worn 23-year-old copy of the hard cover text which has only recently required a couple of rubber bands to keep on the cover has given exemplary service. I cannot

say the same for a recently purchased soft-cover version. In less than a year the binding came apart. I do not recommend its purchase.

Nevertheless, the fame of the Peterson guide is legendary. The format, the quality of the artwork, the compactness and other attributes have served birders and banders well. I believe that it and the Golden guide complement one another and belong, as do Roberts and Wood, in every bander's field pack. While Peterson gave birders the now famous method of displaying key identification characteristics, many a bander has taken to adding his own notes to the color plates. Mine have their share and I heartily recommend the inclusion of these helpful notes. These notes enhance the quick-reference quality of the guide. Especially helpful are the notes contained in Robbins' "A Guide to the Ageing and Sexing of Wood Warblers (Parulidae) in Fall" published in *EBBA News* 27(5):199-215, 1964 (*Regrettably no longer available from E.B.B.A. Ed.*)

One word of caution about some of the more recent printings of Peterson: Examine the color plates before purchasing, because in some copies the color plate quality is poor compared to that of previous printings. I have heard it said that some of the earlier printings are in great demand because of their plate quality.

4. The Sequence of Plumages and Moults of the Passerine Birds of New York. J. Dwight, Jr., from *Annals N.Y. Acad. Sci.*: 13(1), 73-360, 1900. Molt is probably one of the least understood, and yet potentially most useful, identification criteria available to the average bander. For years Dwight's classic presentation on the subject has, for the most part, not been given the attention it deserves. Forbush and Roberts refer frequently to Dwight, however, the full impact of his work cannot be felt except by going to the original text. Unfortunately its availability is somewhat limited. There are relatively few copies in circulation. It is not frequently seen on used book lists. Modern duplication methods have helped to provide copies from the original text. I fortuitously came upon mine through the kind loan of an original from Bob Pantle.

New York State residents can secure a copy for \$10.50 through an interlibrary loan plan available at public libraries. Whether a similar plan exists in other states is a matter that will have to be investigated by the individual. Xerox copies of reference texts, journals, etc. are available from lending libraries when requested through one's own city, county, institutional or industrial library. The first forty pages are sent free of charge. Pages in excess of 40 are charged at the rate of ten cents per page. Dwight's 290 pages can be reproduced at the rate of two per page on 8½x11 paper, thereby requiring 145 Xerox pages for which one must pay for 105.

Alternately, I should like to suggest that a number of banders appeal to Dover Publications, Inc., 180 Varick Street, New York, New York 10014 to have this monumental work reprinted. If enough people were to write, Dover would likely respond with a reasonably priced printing.

I cannot emphasize enough the value of this work in dealing with molt and plumages, and their use as age- and sex-determining aids. I know of no other treatment that takes so much of the mystery out of the subject of molt as this one does.

5. A Bird Bander's Guide to the Determination of Age and Sex of Selected Species, by M. Wood, \$3.00 in soft cover, spiral bound, 181pp., The Pennsylvania State University., Univ. Park Pa., 1969. This recently published guide has been the subject of considerable discussion and in some cases criticism. While it is true that the accuracy of a few of the criteria are questionable, and some worthwhile pertinent data have been omitted, I still feel that this text has qualities that recommend it for inclusion in a bander's library. I like the layout of the text and space for additional notes. It is easy enough for one to gather data from other sources and incorporate them into this text to enhance its value and usefulness. In this way, the most pertinent and up-to-date data may be found in this one easily useable field reference. The subject of sex and age determination is a difficult one and I think that Merrill Wood has offered banders a challenge to improve on the state of the art. While his guide is intended to show what is known, in some cases it illustrates the extent of our lack of knowledge and banders with access to these little known species would do well to devote special attention to them. The author has published a list of corrections (*EBBA News* 33(3):107-8, 1970) with which users of this guide should be familiar.

6. A text on Ornithology. Every bander should be equipped with one of the several basic texts that treat, in a broad manner, the subject of avian biology. These encyclopedic works are treasures of knowledge, and provide references to key works on many subjects. The one with which I am familiar is O.S. Pettin-gill Jr.'s Ornithology in Laboratory and Field, fourth ed., \$12.95, 542pp., Burgess Pub. Co., Minneapolis 1970. One might also wish to consult the following: Fundamentals of Ornithology, by J. Van Tyne and A.J. Berger, \$5.00, 635pp. Dover reprint of the 1959 ed., New York, 1971 (the bibliography is current thru 1970); Bird Study by A. J. Berger, \$3.95, 400pp. Dover reprint New York 1961; or The Life of Birds by J.C. Welty, \$12.00, 559pp. Philadelphia, 1962.

7. Banding Periodicals. To keep current with improved techniques, new methods and the general skills that make one a good bander, subscriptions to EBBA NEWS and BIRD-BANDING are essential.

Since one's very reading of these pages indicates that some kind of contact has already been established with this journal, little else need be said other than to reaffirm the thought that a publication of this type is a sounding board or forum for banding advances and discussions of the problems which banders share.

It is, however, unfortunate that a number of individuals feel that they should subscribe only to the publication of their regional banding organization. Even sadder is the attitude of those who subscribe to no publication at all, however, that is another subject. Because of the nature of its content and the quality of its presentation, Bird-Banding, published by the Northeastern Bird Banding Association, should be in every bander's library. In addition to presenting valuable new information on some of the latest age- and sex determining methods, general banding skills and studies, this journal provides one of the most worthwhile sections on current literature reviews to help each bander broaden his scope.

Mrs. J.R. Downs at Glebe Farm, South Londonderry, Vt. 05115 will gladly accept one's \$6.00 for an annual subscription to four issues totalling about 360 pages.

8. Ex-territorial field guides. For those special occasions when a rarity occurs in one's nets or traps, it pays to have an identification guide(s) to cope with the situation. It seems to me that every bander in the east should be able to cope with western birds. Robbins, *et al*, already provide that capability, and additionally one may be interested in R.T. Peterson's A Field Guide to Western Birds \$5.95 in hard cover, 372 pp., Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1961.

Banders in the Northeast can certainly expect to deal with European vagrants and will want to have access to A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe by R.T. Peterson, G. Montfort and P.A.D. Hollom, \$7.00, 377pp., Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1966, and/or Birds of Europe by B. Bruun and A. Singer, \$6.95, 320pp, Golden Press, New York 1971.

In the South where birds from the West Indies, Mexico and Central America might be expected, one would find the following of interest: Birds of the West Indies by J. Bond, \$8.95, 256pp, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1971; A Field Guide to the Birds of Texas, \$6.95, 336pp., Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1963; A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Central America by L. I. Davis, \$6.50, 300pp., Univ. of Texas Press, Austin, 1972; A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico, by E.P. Edwards, \$8.50, 306pp., Sweet Briar, Va., 1972; Birds of Guatamala by H.C. Land, \$10.00, 381pp Livingston Publishing Co, Wynnewood Pa., 1970.

B. Nice to have if one can afford them.

1. At the top of the list without peer is E.H. Forbush's Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States published in three volumes in 1925, 1927 and 1929 by Norwood Press, Norwood, Mass., for the Mass. Dept. of Agriculture. The passerines are dealt with in the latter part of Vol. II and in Vol. III. As testimony to the value of this work and the charm of the author's style, the three volumes are trading hands at used book shops for approximately \$100. Five to ten years ago when they sold for \$50., it was still possible to acquire mint copies of Vol. III from a book dealer by the name of Eric Lundberg in Ashton, Md., for \$7.50. I do not know whether copies are still available.

Beside being a foremost reference text on plumages, occurrence, etc., Forbush's work possesses a most articulate and pleasing writing style with which one can easily relax on a long winter evening next to the fire. What also is truly impressive is the feeling that one gets for the author's profound familiarity with, and sensitive appreciation of, birds. Forego a year's supply of nicotine, alcohol or flab and acquire these three volumes: one will be all the healthier and wiser for the effort.

2. Another multivolume work which provides valuable migrational distribution data, dates, and which is the bible on life histories is A.C. Bent's Life Histories of North American Birds in 25 volumes. Original sets from the Smithsonian Institution are too dearly priced even to mention. Even the Dover reprint series at \$82.50 for the set is expensive, however, if one wants to limit one's efforts to the 14 volumes dealing with species likely to be netted or trapped, the bill comes to a more manageable \$56.00. More detailed information can be obtained from Dover.

These volumes provide a wealth of supplemental information which may not deal with identification, but which tune a bander's appreciation for the occurrence of birds, and their life style.

3. A.O.U. Check-List. The Fifth Ed., prepared and published by the American Ornithologists' Union, \$8.00, 704pp., Port City Press, Baltimore 1957. This is the bible on specific and subspecific recognition, range and the latest accepted nomenclature. It is a technical reference work for the more serious bander.

4. Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America by F.M. Chapman, \$4.50, 617pp, Dover reprint of the 1939 second rev. ed., New York 1966. This is an old-time favorite, key-type identification guide used for many years by banders and birders pre-Peterson. Due to the availability of the other authoritative texts, I have not personally developed a strong attachment to it. I usually use it as a supplemental source. At one time it no doubt occupied a prominent position, but at present it is somewhat dated.

Another of Chapman's works which deals in greater descriptive detail with a selected group of birds in his The Warblers of North America, \$3.00, 323pp., Dover reprint of the third ed., of 1917, New York, 1968.

5. Regional Bird Books. Numerous state or regional works exist which give a local flavor to ornithology. Such works are too numerous to list with one exception. Banders can usually locate these works through word-of-mouth contact, local book stores, bird clubs, etc., Every bander would do well to have a reference dealing with his region. It contributes to a better understanding of local phenomena, and some of these works contain valuable descriptive information.

The one exception, and I mention it because its sage words apply beyond the confines of its title and involve a considerable number of EBBA members, is J. Bull's Birds of the New York Area, \$8.95, 554pp., Harper and Row, New York, 1964 (*An update to this work can be found in "Supplement to Birds of the New York Area" Proc. Linn. Soc., N.Y. #71, March 1970. Ed.*). Banders in southern New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and bordering areas will find much valuable information on when to expect various species, insight on some problems related to tricky identifications and ample justification for the case that must be exercised in making identifications. By reading it, one can appreciate more fully the care required in fully documenting identifications.

Costs

One can see that acquiring a library can be costly. Those texts listed as "essential" cost a minimum of about \$65, or as high as \$140 if one purchased all of the options. The "nice-to-have" ones add another \$200+ to the overall cost. Therefore it pays one to seek ways to economize on acquiring these. While some of these texts are specialized ones which are difficult to get and for which one can expect to pay list price, there are others of a more popular variety which may be obtained at discounted prices if one is willing to shop.

Some book shop operators are a little hungrier for business than the next fellow and will offer discounts. Sometimes large department stores or the discount giants will discount these items. There also are mail order houses specializing in books at a discount. The "New York Times" Sunday book section offers a partial listing.

One can achieve further saving by using the itemized deduction option on one's federal income tax form. Those banders who can prove to the IRS the seriousness of their banding as a research activity qualify to deduct direct, out-of-pocket expenses on their income tax form. This deduction is allowed because these

expenses are incurred in the gathering of data which are contributed to a non-profit organization, namely the Fish & Wildlife Service. (*EBBA News editors recommend that you ask the IRS for a copy of the publication concerning itemized deductions, to fully familiarize yourself with the laws involved. Ed.*) Therefore, texts, supplies, equipment, lodging away from home, etc., are deductible costs. In the case of texts, one can obtain a saving comparable to one's terminal tax rate.

To those of you who are beginners, I hope that these recommendations are of value, and that the list is not too overwhelming or frustrating. In my own case, it has taken me 10 years to acquire the bulk of these texts, and it is not expected that a beginner would rush out and purchase these in one brief spree. In addition, a library is no better than one's familiarity with it. With each text a bander must develop an intimate working understanding in order to derive full benefit from its printed words and illustrations. It takes time to acquire this familiarity, so keep trying, be patient, but don't be too easily pleased. There's always a better way for one who persists in looking.

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AN AGE-DETERMINING TECHNIQUE FOR FEMALE EVENING GROSBEAKS

Robert P. Yunick

A recent opportunity in November to compare simultaneously the plumages of two female Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) of different age revealed flight plumage differences which appear to be useful criteria for separating first-year females. I have not yet had the opportunity to examine these criteria on a large enough series of birds to ascertain their reliability. However, since a major flight appears to be in the making for this winter, and since I am not aware of any banders who are using these criteria, I would like to call attention to them so that more banders may use this upcoming flight as an opportunity to examine these criteria for reliability. The low degree of skull pneumatization of some of the birds handled in November suggests that at least some individuals of the year's crop of young will be recognizable by skull examination into January, or perhaps even February.

The bird with incomplete pneumatization of the skull (HY) differed from the bird whose skull was completely pneumatized (AHY) in the following ways: 1) Coloration and marking of the primary coverts; 2) Coloration of the primaries; 3) Coloration of the secondary coverts; and 4) Extent of white marking on the primaries.