

REVIEW

Florida Birds Exposed, by Juanita N. Baker. 2019. Pelican Island Audubon Society, Vero Beach, Florida. ISBN 978-0-578-570-58-7. \$29.95 softcover. 222 pages.

Juanita Baker is a retired clinical psychologist and a Professor Emerita at the School of Psychology, Florida Institute of Technology, in Melbourne, Florida. She and her husband Richard live in Sebastian and have long been associated with Pelican Island Audubon Society (PIAS). In 2009, Baker instituted a “photo of the month” feature for PIAS; these photographs were published in the Society’s journal *The Peligram* and form the basis of this book. Baker began the photo feature as a means of educating photographers on the importance of not disturbing birds.

The book’s introductory material includes “The Story of Florida’s Birds,” which presents their evolution and the impacts from humans over the past 14,000 years; a primer on selected Florida ecosystems with brief lists of birds found in each; migration seasons and routes, illustrating the Mississippi and Atlantic flyways; an explanation of the different categories of Florida’s birds (e.g., permanent resident, winter resident, migrant, vagrant); conservation topics such as the importance of prescribed fire and the public acquisition of additional lands; how to be a better birder, and how to be a better photographer. Baker’s poetry and quotations from others are interspersed throughout. The book includes a Table of Contents but not an Index.

Following the introductory material are full-page accounts for 75 species of birds. The accounts present biological data on each species, especially as they pertain to Florida, and often reference the accompanying photographs. On the facing page is the full-page “Photo of the Month” for that species. Baker referenced the Birds of North America (now Birds of the World) series produced by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York for the biological information that she provides. She avoids using overly technical terms that might be off-putting to many of her readers. The taxonomy follows the 2018 version of the Florida Ornithological Society Official Bird List, except that families are organized by their primary food items, with aquatic non-passerines followed by land-dwelling non-passerines, and then by passerines. Forty references are cited in the text via superscript numerals.

Florida Birds Exposed contains 227 bird photographs and 17 habitat photographs taken by 53 photographers. The photographs represent 142 species, about half of which are accompanied by full-page species accounts. Perhaps not surprisingly, considering their abundance and conspicuousness in Florida, the book emphasizes non-passerines (most notably wading birds and shorebirds) over passerines. The three most-represented species are Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*; eight photographs), Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*; seven photographs), and Black Skimmer (*Rhynchops niger*; five photographs). Passerines represent 29% of the species and 25% of the photographs, with each species represented by one or two photographs.

Baker has chosen well the images found in the book; most are first-rate. Personal favorites include a Wilson’s Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*) sheltering two chicks, a Bonaparte’s Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) in flight, a Sandhill Crane (*Antigone canadensis*) and colt, a Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) foraging, a Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) and Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) in aigrette displays, a head-shot of a Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*), a preening Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), a foraging Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*; but the claimed 17-mm focal length must be in error), two nestling Eastern Screech-Owls (*Megascops asio*), a perched Belted Kingfisher

(*Megasceryle alcyon*), a Prairie Warbler (*Setophaga discolor*) and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliptila cerulea*) sharing a perch, an eastern Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus s. savannarum*), and a leucistic Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata*). I was unaware of the record, so I was surprised by the photograph of a black-backed Western Spindalis (*Spindalis z. zena*) at Vero Beach, Indian River County, during 21–29 April 2017. Discovered by Will Johnson, his photographs document the northernmost record of the species in Florida (and the United States).

Commendably, all photographs in the book were taken in Florida, and all but one are correctly identified. The crow duo at Paurotis Pond, Everglades National Park, Miami-Dade County almost certainly represents American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) rather than Fish Crows (*C. ossifragus*) because the latter species is quite rare in the park, whereas the former is common and conspicuous. I was impressed that Baker includes a photograph of Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) × Mottled Duck (*A. fulvigula*) hybrids or backcrosses, a form that is usually overlooked in Florida.

Except for two pages devoted to some of the more common and better-known species, exotic birds are not featured. I understand Baker's reluctance to feature exotic birds in a book with a conservation theme, but I disagree with her claim that most exotic birds are negatively affecting native species and habitats. As an example, she states that Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*) “. . . damage Florida's ecology . . . and displace our native bird species,” but the species is a human commensal primarily restricted to a few lakes in downtown Lakeland and downtown Orlando. Mallard is an exotic in Florida only as a breeding species; “wild” individuals regularly winter in northern Florida. The inclusion of Tricolored Munia (*Lonchura malacca*) in the list of Florida's established exotic birds is strange, given that there are fewer than ten records in the state, all of them of singles. Budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) have been extirpated since 2014 (Pranty 2015, The disappearance of the Budgerigar from the ABA Area, *Birding* 47[4]:34–40).

The captions for most photographs in the book include very specific photographic details, including the make and model of the camera body and lens, the focal length, ISO setting, shutter speed, and f-stop. Although important to some photographers, these details will be of little or no use to most readers of this book. The location within Florida is listed for nearly every photograph, but the year the photograph was taken is never presented, and the month is shown as a simply a two-digit code (e.g., 04 for April). If Baker revises her book, then I suggest that she provide the full date and the location (including county) for every photograph. Knowing the seasonality and location of a photograph helps the reader to understand bird distribution and biological aspects such as breeding phenology, plumage sequences, and molt periods.

I noted several errors, mostly typographical (e.g., “Rich” rather than Ritch Grissom, “Fort Desota State Park” rather than Fort De Soto [county] Park), and misspellings of Phasianidae, Phalacrocoracidae, Aramus, Haliaeetus, Myiarchus, and Hirundinidae. Fishes, not birds, are the most diverse class of vertebrates. Limpkin and Snail Kite may be (mostly) limited to Florida in the United States, but both species occur widely in the American tropics.

These quibbles aside, I enjoyed reading the text and leafing through the beautiful photographs in *Florida Birds Exposed*, and I thank Juanita Baker and Pelican Island Audubon Society for stressing conservation of the state's magnificent birdlife. The book deserves to be in selected public libraries and could serve as a model for other bird clubs to produce books on their local avifauna.

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