

Seabirds: an identification guide.—Peter Harrison. 1983. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company. 448 pp., 88 color plates, 31 black-and-white figures, 324 distribution maps. \$29.95.—It took the author eleven years to research and compile this guide. Seven of those years were spent travelling throughout the world, not only visiting every major seaport, but spending part of that time working as a deckhand aboard fishing vessels, thus enabling him to more easily study and sketch many seabirds. Just imagine the experiences of observing all but 30 of the world's known species of seabirds. One can only drool with envy! The result of Harrison's efforts is the most thorough examination ever of the field characters of the world's 312 seabird species. Seabirds consists of six basic sections: Introduction; Art Plates and Facing Captions; Systematic List and Main Text; Distribution Maps; Selected Bibliography; and Index. A glossary and sketch of the topography of a seabird precede the introduction. The Introduction includes discussions of the pitfalls of birding at sea (known all too well by any birder who has taken a pelagic trip) and of the basic seabird characteristics vital to differentiating various families and species therein.

What most birders examine first when evaluating an identification guide are the illustrations. None will be disappointed with these. The color plates, featuring over 1600 birds, are beautifully done and, in most instances, accurately depicted. Harrison is truly a marvelous artist who captures the "jizz" (the overall impression that immediately distinguishes a particular species) of each species as well, if not better, than any other artist of his kind. The fact that he observed "in the wild" most of the species he illustrated is quite evident in his work. He gives special attention to relevant facts not found in other guides. Especially helpful is that virtually all subspecies which can be differentiated through field characteristics are illustrated. For example, both races of Yellow-nosed Albatross are illustrated, yet North American guides published prior to Seabirds depict the "white-faced" race (*bassi*) rather than the "gray-faced" nominate subspecies (*chlorohyochos*), the only one known to occur in North American waters. Also, all immature plumages that one is likely to encounter are illustrated: I wonder how many birders, during their first summer encounter with the Common Murre, have been frustrated when trying to identify the "murrelets" accompanying the murre? I certainly was, because North American guides fail to explain that young Common Murres leave their ledges "18-25 days after hatching" (according to Seabirds) and, when observed at a distance, these birds, (of course, not illustrated in American guides) resemble murrelets.

To allow quick reference, concise notes taken from the main text appear on the left page opposite the species illustrated. Also included here are the species' average length and wingspan, plus the page numbers for its range map and main text. The main text discusses the field characteristics of each species and subspecies in detail. Preferred habitat, behavior, manner of flight, egg and fledgling dates, and characters differentiating similar species are also discussed. Black-and-white illustrations are included when differentiation of special features is warranted. Unlike the illustrations which are grouped according

to similarity of features, species in the main text are listed taxonomically. However, the species numbering system, which allows one to go quickly from a species' illustration, to its place in the main text, to its range map, and back, are evidence of Harrison's careful approach to putting the book together. At the end of the main text, the author briefly discusses sea-ducks and refers the reader to various guides for more indepth discussions of this group. Also included here are three pages of black-and-white illustrations of the 20 species of ducks that frequent seas and bays. Too bad Harrison did not illustrate these in color also—the male eiders and Harlequin Duck would have been grand finishing touches to his artistry. The style of the range maps are similar to those of other world distribution maps, but ranges are depicted much more accurately than in most. This is a major accomplishment in itself. Breeding, non-breeding and migratory distribution are clearly indicated. And for those who truly want to increase their knowledge of seabirds, the bibliography is well worth examining. Each entry is cross-referenced to the main text and most sources included are available through major university libraries.

Unfortunately, in describing the plumages and molts of species, like other noted British writers, the author chose to continue the use of obsolete terms such as "first-winter" (acquired "about August"), "first-summer" (attained in March), "adult non-breeding" (instead of adult basic), etc., rather than adopt the Humphrey-Parkes system which is a much more precise and sensible approach. As most respected British field ornithologists stress the importance of correctly ageing a species (and rightly so), it seems strange that British authors continue to use obsolete terminology. There are a few shortcomings in the color plates. Certain features in some of the illustrations are inaccurate (i.e., coloring of "juvenile" Masked Booby and "first-winter" Thayer's Gull, bill-color of Royal Tern); a few illustrations fail to depict some diagnostic field characteristics (i.e., the well-defined pale border around the primary tips of "first-winter" Thayer's Gull, the barring on the upper- and under-tail coverts of "juvenile" Lesser Black-backed Gull); and some particularly important plumages and soft-part colorations are left out entirely (i.e., juvenal plumages of both Ring-billed and Laughing gulls and yellowish bill of juvenal-plumaged Royal Tern, often retained well after these species leave their breeding grounds). Inaccurate details also occur occasionally in the written text. The Western Grebe, *not* the Red-necked, is "the largest North American grebe." "Juvenile" Thayer's Gull primaries are not "*uniform* greyish-brown" (emphasis mine), but are as I described previously. The introductory paragraph for Royal Tern limits the breeding range to "Coasts of Central America and equatorial West Africa," yet it breeds quite extensively in southern North America. Unfortunately, the bibliography omits titles of journal articles, and also inadvertently omits at least eight references used in the text (including Atherton and Atherton 1980). However, I consider such just minor flaws for a book that encompasses so much.

What impresses me most about *Seabirds* is that it includes not only the field characteristics needed for differentiating species—typical of most identification guides—but also all other pertinent information that one might need when doing preliminary research. Thus, it is no wonder that *Seabirds* was selected as British Birds' "Best Bird Book of the Year." If such an award

existed in North America, no doubt it would win here, too. All field ornithologists should be grateful that Harrison had the perseverance (and, certainly, patience) to complete this tremendous undertaking in such a relatively short time. Unfortunately, *Seabirds* is not available in softcover form and is not really suitable for carrying in the field (other than in one's car "library"). Its bulk and cost will discourage most birders from carrying it in-the-hand while dodging the saltwater on pelagic trips. Essentially, it is a reference book for one's home library and no serious birder should be without it!—Lyn Atherton, P.O. Box 58124, Tierra Verde, Florida 33715.

Florida Field Naturalist 12: 77-79, 1984.

REPORTS

Summary of the 1984 spring meeting.—The Florida Ornithological Society held its annual meeting, 27-29 April 1984, in St. Petersburg, Florida with Dave Goodwin and the St. Petersburg Audubon Society as hosts. Fred Lohrer highlighted the recently completed handbook on "How to host an FOS meeting" and thanked members who assisted him in its preparation. He received special thanks from the Board of Directors and members-at-large. The revised Articles of Incorporation were approved by the Board with all members present. A copy of the articles will be mailed to members so they may vote on them at the fall meeting. Thanks were extended to the St. Petersburg Audubon Society for their gift of \$100 to the Research Fund. The FOS will recognize the 50th anniversary of the Peterson Field guide to the birds with a letter of appreciation composed by Bill Hardy. Wayne Hoffman, chairman of the nominating committee, recommended Bob Brown, Mary Davidson, and Jack Dozier to serve as board members. They were unanimously elected at the annual membership meeting.

Glen Woolfenden was moderator of a panel discussion about the new field guides available to birders and Lyn Atherton, Wayne Hoffman, Howard Langridge, and Fred Lohrer were featured participants. Manny Alvarez correctly identified all skins in the quiz prepared by Glen Woolfenden. A bird song quiz, a new feature, was prepared by Jeff Moore and won by Henry Stevenson. President Kittleson and Past-president Below recognized Caroline Coleman for her extraordinary service as treasurer with a gift. Our banquet was highlighted by a surprise visit from Governor Bob Graham, and a talk by Benton Basham on his birding adventures in 1983 when he sighted 711 species of birds in North America.

The 1984 fall meeting will be held in West Palm Beach, 5-7 October, with Howard Langridge as the local chairman. Steve Nesbitt and James Rodgers have invited FOS to Gainesville in April 1985.—Marsha S. Winegarner, Route 2, Box 180, Lake Placid, Florida 33852.

Florida Field Naturalist 12: 79, 1984.