

Reviews

A Birdwatcher's Adventures in Tropical America. By Alexander F. Skutch. University of Texas Press, Austin & London, 1977: 327 pp., ink sketches, maps. \$13.95 (hardback)

This book is written in much the same style as Skutch's previous work: A Naturalist in Costa Rica (Univ. of Fla. Press, 1971). However, as the titles reflect, the book being reviewed is concerned primarily with tropical birds, their habits and lives. This book is also rich in detailed observations of the flora, geography, and people. This is evident in the titles of three of my favorite chapters: "Bird Watching During a Revolution", "Through Mexico by Train", and "Birds and Ants".

As an account of a naturalist's wanderings in tropical America, the time span covered is from the early 1930's to the present. Countries covered include Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and Costa Rica. The account starts with Skutch working for the Arnold Arboretum as a botanist. He found that he could survive financially by collecting plant specimens for museums and universities. Later, during the war, he was employed by the United States to explore for possible sources of rubber in South America. Knowing something of the time, patience, and precision that constitute collection and preservation of plants, I can only wonder how Skutch found the time to pursue his primary passion - the observation of birds.

I believe that all potential readers will enjoy this book. When reading, it takes little imagination to see, hear, and feel the story. For those planning an excursion far to the south, the detailed descriptions of the plants, people, and birds (especially the habits, nests, and songs) will prove to be an invaluable aid.--Ren Lohofener, Department of Zoology, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, Ms. 39762.

A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico. By Ernest P. Edwards. Published by the author (Sweet Briar, Virginia 24595), 1972: 300 pp., 2 maps, 24 color plates. \$8.50 (softcover)

Mexico, with its more than 1000 bird species, is attracting ever-increasing numbers of American birdwatchers. There are now two excellent Mexican field guides: Edwards' volume, and Peterson and Chalif's "A Field Guide to Mexican Birds" (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1973). Edwards' book is the main subject of this review, but I feel obliged to make the inevitable comparisons with the Peterson guide (hereafter P&C).

In the color plates, Edwards definitely comes out second best. Of the 24 plates, 14½ are by Murrell Butler, 8 by Edwards himself, 1 by John O'Neill, and ½ by Doug Pratt. Some of Edwards' plates are poor both in

artwork and, even more so, in color reproduction (e.g. Pl. 17 - who ever heard of a Rufous-backed Robin with a yellow back?). On the other hand, some of Butler's plates, and O'Neill's plate of parrots, are excellent. Several plates suffer from overcrowding; Edwards covers in 24 plates essentially the same species that P&C cover in 48. Both books omit illustrating virtually all species found north of Mexico, so that the birder in Mexico will have to take along his North American field guides as well as one or both Mexican guides.

In the text itself, I would rate Edwards better than P&C, at least partly because Edwards' species accounts average longer. The biggest deficiency is the lack of "Similar Species" paragraphs like those in P&C, telling one exactly how to tell Species X from its similar relatives; this is only partly rectified by lists of potentially confusing species in the family descriptions. However, the species descriptions themselves are more complete, with important field marks italicized. Edwards generally gives more details than P&C on elevation ranges (important in a mountainous country like Mexico!), habitats, and behavior. He also includes Spanish common names and condensed Spanish descriptions, which may be helpful. Both books give capsule accounts only of distribution, which are often vague, inaccurate, or outdated; an 8-page looseleaf insert (dated 1976) provided with Edwards' book helps to correct this. For information on specific birding localities, readers are referred to Edwards' "Finding Birds in Mexico", 2nd ed. (published by the author, 1968), and its 1976 supplement (see review in Mississippi Kite 7(2):58-59, 1977).

In summary, I would highly recommend Edwards' book to any birder visiting Mexico. Although the plates are outclassed by those in the Peterson guide, the text is generally more informative, and I would be loath to visit Mexico without taking both books along.--Wayne C. Weber, Box Z, Mississippi State, Ms. 39762.

The Book of Owls. By Lewis Wayne Walker. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1974: 256 pp., black-and-white photographs, 1 map. \$12.50 (hardback).

This fact-filled book, published three years after the death of the author, represents one of the finest additions to our knowledge of the owls of North America. It culminates a fifty-five year love affair between Lewis Wayne Walker and the birds he loved most, the owls.

The fourteen chapters, thirteen of which deal with major species of North America, contain 94 black-and-white photographs, most taken by the author himself. The species accounts range from information on the tiny, moth-like Elf Owl of the southwestern United States to the Great Gray and Hawk Owl of the Canadian north country. Each chapter contains a wealth of scientific knowledge about a particular species, along with

some of Walker's own personal experiences. It is evident that thousands of hours of observation were required to produce such an amazing amount of fact and knowledge.

Walker's life-long dedication to ornithology and owls in particular is best portrayed by George E. Lindsay of the California Academy of Sciences in the forward of The Book of Owls. It reads:

"Lew Walker was a born naturalist. As a child he haunted the woods and fields and marshes near his home on Long Island Sound. As a young man he spent ninety-six nights in the bell tower of the First Congregational Church in Flushing, Long Island, studying and photographing a pair of Barn Owls nesting there, and learning that they brought 758 rats and mice to feed their chicks. This study marked the beginning of Lew's long interest in owls."

This book would be a welcomed addition to anyone's library, especially those interested in owls.--C. Dwight Cooley, Department of Zoology, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762.

A Guide to the Birds of Panama. By Robert S. Ridgely. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1976: 394 pp., line drawings, 32 color plates, maps. \$15.00 (hardback).

Although Panama is approximately the same size as Mississippi, this Latin American country has nearly three times as many bird species - 883 species in Panama as opposed to about 330 in Mississippi. In fact, there are more species known from Panama than from all of North America! With this diversity in mind, one can easily imagine the enormity of the task of preparing a field guide for the area. Robert Ridgely has succeeded admirably with this book. A Guide to the Birds of Panama follows the general format of the Peterson field guides, but includes much additional information. For example, there are tables of climatic data, lists of migrant species and rare visitors, and an appendix on finding birds in Panama. The color illustrations of nearly 650 species by John A. Gwynne, Jr. are generally well done and greatly enhance the value of this guide. All royalties from sales of this book are to go to the International Council for Bird Preservation U.S. Section for Conservation in Panama. As one reviewer put it, A Guide to the Birds of Panama is truly a "labor of love."--J.A. Jackson, Department of Zoology, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, Ms. 39762.

Fundamentals of Ornithology. By Josselyn Van Tyne and Andrew J. Berger, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1976: XVIII + 808 pp., 528 illus. \$23.95.

The many advances in ornithology since 1958 make this second edition of Van Tyne and Berger's Fundamentals of Ornithology a welcome addition to the library of most advanced and serious beginning students of ornithology. The new edition incorporates many recent breakthroughs in ornithological knowledge, such as Ostrom's recent findings on the origin of birds, with a good basic coverage of ornithological fundamentals. In addition, there are liberal literature citations within the text as well as at the end of each chapter; these will help the interested student find further information on subjects of particular interest.

Other changes in the new edition include an increase from 254 to 528 illustrations, the expansion of the chapter on breeding biology to two chapters, the addition of a section on physiology, and the addition of two new families (Rhabdornithidae and Climacteridae) to the chapter on bird families of the world. Regrettably these improvements have necessitated the deletion of the glossary and the section on ornithological sources. The loss of the former is especially serious in that it decreases the usefulness of the book - especially for the beginning ornithology student who often tends to skip over unfamiliar words rather than look up the definition in another book. Generally, however, the book provides a concise, readable introduction to ornithology. It is invaluable both as a text for beginning students and a reference for the advanced student.--Bette Schardien, Department of Zoology, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, Ms. 39762

The World of Roger Tory Peterson. By John C. Devlin and Grace Naismith. Times Books, New York, 1977: 266 pp., several black-and-white drawings, black-and-white photographs, and 15 color plates by Roger Tory Peterson. \$14.95.

Roger Tory Peterson is known to all of us as the author of "A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America" and the author or illustrator of several other field guides and books on natural history. While his name is a "household" word among the bird-watching fraternity, most probably know little of Roger's fascinating career and multiplicity of talents. In this biography by John Devlin and Grace Naismith you will share Roger's early adventures with birds in New York, learn of his struggles as an artist and his first job painting Chinese decorations on lacquered furniture, and how he put his identification system to work during the second world war in teaching soldiers to identify enemy aircraft. You will find his human strengths and weaknesses revealed in the accounts of his three marriages and his various expeditions around the globe. Here is a biography that "tells it like it is" - both the good and the bad. Once I started the book I could hardly bear to put it down. I highly recommend it to you.--J.A. Jackson, Box Z, Mississippi State, Ms. 39762.

Manual of Neotropical Birds, Volume 1. By Emmet R. Blake, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1977: 674 pp., keys, several wash drawings and color plates, 237 maps. \$50.00.

This mammoth volume is the first of a four volume series on the birds of tropical Mexico, Central and South America. This region of the world includes more than one-third of all living bird species and in recent years has been the "hot spot" for discovery of new species. Emmet Blake has spent 48 years in the field and laboratory collecting data and preparing this comprehensive and authoritative series. This first volume includes the families Spheniscidae (penguins) through Laridae (gulls and allies) and includes illustrations of 225 species. The book begins with a synopsis of the families with a simple line drawing along with a brief paragraph describing the salient behavioral, morphological and ecological characteristics of each. Within the body of the book there is a key to species for each family followed by technical descriptions, measurements, and notes on distribution of each species and subspecies. The plates by Richard V. Keane and Guy Tudor are outstanding and contribute immensely to the value of the book. Because of its size, technical nature, and lack of illustrations for most forms, this is obviously not a field guide. I'm sure, however, that this series will quickly become a standard and much appreciated reference for students of Neotropical ornithology.--J.A. Jackson, Box Z, Mississippi State, Ms. 39762

The Hen Harrier. By Donald Watson, T & A D Poyser, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, England, 1977: 307 pp., numerous black-and-white sketches, 4 color plates of adults, nests, eggs, and young harriers. 6.80 pounds.

The Hen Harrier is a very close relative of our Marsh Hawk and this book will be of special interest to anyone interested in Marsh Hawks or birds of prey in general. Donald Watson has studied Hen Harriers since the 1940's and has watched their population fluctuations and studied various aspects of their natural history in great detail. This monograph brings together not only his extensive experiences but also most of the world's literature on Marsh Hawks and their relatives. It is written in a non-technical language but with sufficient scientific detail to be of value to the professional as well as stimulating reading for the avid amateur ornithologist.--J.A. Jackson, Box Z, Mississippi State, Ms. 39762.