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New World Blackbirds: The Icterids.—Alvaro Jaramillo and Peter Burke. 1999. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 432 pp., 39 color plates, 17 figures. ISBN 0-691-00680-6. Cloth, \$49.50.—The New World blackbirds exhibit exceptional diversity in morphology (ranging from some of the smaller *Agelaius* and orioles through the giant oropendolas) and ecology (occurring in a wide variety of habitats including marshes, grasslands, deciduous forests, and tropical wet forests). It is their nearly unparalleled diversity in social behavior, however, that has attracted the attention of many ornithologists. Among the blackbirds one can find species that are socially monogamous (many orioles), highly polygynous (caciques, grackles, and oropendolas), cooperative breeders with low levels of polyandry (Brown-and-yellow Marshbird [*Pseudoleistes virescens*], Bay-winged Cowbird [*Molothrus badius*]), colonial breeders (oropendolas), and obligate brood parasites (most of the cowbirds). Thanks to this diversity, the icterids have been the focus of much research and have figured prominently in the development and testing of many theories in behavior, ecology, and evolution.

Jaramillo and Burke have produced a book that serves as a guide to the natural history of this fascinating family of birds. Their stated goal was not to produce a field guide or a scientific monograph, but rather to give an overview of the natural history of blackbirds that will serve as a “starting point for anyone interested in the icterids” (p. 9). To do this, they provide detailed species accounts, most of which are several pages long. A total of 103 species is included (a somewhat larger number than that commonly recognized because Jaramillo and Burke include taxa that are “widely regarded” to be full species). Also provided are detailed accounts of an additional six subspecies that differ markedly from other populations of the same species (e.g. Fuerte’s Oriole [*Icterus spurius fuertesi*]).

The species accounts are well organized, giving details of identification, voice, plumage, geographic variation, habitat, behavior, nesting, distribution and status, movements, and molt patterns. Each account ends with a list of relevant literature to which the interested reader can turn for more details. Each species is also shown in a detailed color plate that includes a range map and, in many cases, shows plumage variation associated with sex, age, molt, and/or geography. The plate for Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), for example, shows 13 individuals of various age/sex classes and subspecies.

By far the greatest strength of this book is the extensive literature that the authors have amassed and summarized for each species. The bibliography includes more than 1,000 citations, including several

theses and papers in relatively obscure journals. Moreover, the authors do a good job summarizing the literature for each species, making it possible to look up any blackbird of interest and quickly learn virtually all that is known about its morphology and plumage (the details of geographic variation are quite good in most cases), voice, distribution and status, and behavior (particularly breeding behavior, which has been the focus of many studies). The job of summarizing was no small task for species that have been the target of numerous studies (e.g. Red-winged Blackbird and Brown-headed Cowbird [*Molothrus ater*]). Thus, this book will serve as an extremely useful reference for those interested in the natural history of blackbirds.

The primary weakness of this book is that it gives relatively little in the way of an overview of the general trends and patterns for this diverse family of birds. That is, little attempt is made to place the detailed species accounts into a broader context of evolutionary and behavioral theory. Systematic relationships among blackbirds are touched upon, as are some general behavioral and evolutionary issues, but the treatment is extremely brief and superficial. Similarly, it is difficult to glean from this volume general patterns of life histories, plumage variation, ecological groupings, mating systems, and parental behavior, nor is there any treatment of the interaction between humans and blackbirds (e.g. conservation issues relevant to the rarer forms).

Given the above, this volume will be most useful for those generally interested in blackbirds and those with very targeted, species-specific questions, such as “what are the patterns of geographic variation in Streak-backed Orioles (*Icterus pustulatus*)?” or “which species are parasitized by Giant Cowbirds (*Scaphidura* [*Molothrus oryzivora*]?” However, those interested in more general questions such as “what are the patterns of sexual dimorphism in blackbirds?” or “how do food resources affect blackbird distributions?” will have to extract and synthesize the information themselves from the species accounts. Ornithologists interested in questions of the latter type will do better to turn first to more-focused monographs (e.g. Searcy and Yasukawa 1995), or to the excellent book by Gordon Orians (1985), even though the latter is nearly 15 years old and targeted at a lay audience. Indeed, a hybrid between the synthetic approach of Orians (1985) and the exhaustive, up-to-date literature survey of Jaramillo and Burke would be a welcome and useful addition to the ornithological literature (a hint to any of you looking for a book to write!).

By and large, the illustrations by Peter Burke are detailed, accurate, and engaging, making this book handsome as well as useful. However, the choice of background color for some of the plates is questionable. This is particularly true for some of the blackbirds and grackles, whose portraits fade into the

dark backgrounds. Aside from this quibble, the plates do an excellent job of portraying the birds in realistic poses and settings. Similarly, the text figures do a good job of showing variation in plumage for a few confusing groups or species pairs.

In summary, this book is an excellent and detailed species-by-species account of the natural history of a very diverse and interesting group of birds. Although it is difficult to extract general behavioral trends and evolutionary patterns from this book, the information content is high, and one can easily find the details relevant to any particular species of interest. It is, as the authors intended, a very good starting point for those interested in the biology of icterids.—MICHAEL S. WEBSTER, *Department of Biological Sciences, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York 14260, USA.*

LITERATURE CITED

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Goose Populations of the Western Palearctic: A Review of Status and Distribution.—Edited by Jesper Madsen, Gill Cracknell, and Tony Fox. 1999. National Environmental Research Institute, Rönne, Denmark. 334 pp., 26 black-and-white plates, 29 tables, 107 figures. ISBN 87-7772-437-2. Cloth, GBP 25 (ca. \$40.00).—This volume is an impressive and handsomely presented compilation of the status and distribution of the 23 Eurasian goose populations, which represent seven species not found in North America. It contains a detailed presentation of population sizes that are spatially referenced by distinct breeding, migration, or wintering areas. Perhaps more impressive is the cooperation required to assemble information from a part of the world that is much more politically stratified than we are accustomed to in North America. This “biopolitical diversity” comprises contributions from 19 principal authors, 56 coauthors, and an additional 23 contributors.

The motivation for the book involved a need to assemble a diversity of information into a single resource. An introductory chapter provides historical and geographical perspectives for how monitoring is accomplished and discusses potential biases in esti-

mates of productivity. It also includes information on which populations have been studied using marked individuals. Of 23 recognized goose populations representing 9 species and 13 subspecies, 14 currently show increasing trends, 4 are stable, 2 are decreasing, and trajectories for 3 are unknown. Most trend data in this book are based on counts rather than on statistical estimates of population size from a sampling design. This is because geese are highly gregarious and clumped and do not lend themselves easily to spatially random sampling during migration or in winter. Nevertheless, counts underestimate population size because of incomplete detectability, and the distinction in this book between counts and estimates is sometimes clouded. Thus, readers probably should consider population numbers in this book to be biased low by an unknown amount.

After the introduction are 23 chapters that follow a uniform format for each population, as referenced by breeding area. Each chapter contains six sections starting with a general review of the population including range, delineation of flyways, population trends, breeding success, and mortality. The next three sections of each chapter address population issues from a geographical perspective: breeding grounds, staging areas, and finally staging/wintering areas in countries where both exist. For example, the first section provides details on breeding distribution and breeding ecology with information on habitat use, feeding ecology, molt migrations, and molting areas, as well as a summary of research, including banding activities and basic breeding ecology. Finally, this section ends with a discussion of protection and conservation on the breeding grounds, including hunting legislation, site protection, and conflicts with agriculture where they exist. Separate sections on staging and staging/winter areas cover distribution (range, habitat, and feeding ecology), abundance (phenology of migration, trends, and numbers), research activities, and protection and legislation. Information in these last two sections is replicated for each country in which a population is found. For example, the Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser a. albifrons*) occurs in no fewer than 25 countries in the western Palearctic! Thus, considerable detail is available for those who wish to examine such stratified information.

The penultimate section for each population is a discussion of current population status, range changes, and conservation issues (including speculation about the effect of hunting on population size, agricultural conflict, future research needs, and international conservation). Finally, extensive bibliographies make this book a valuable compendium of publications for each population.

Personally, I found value in being able to compare sizes and trajectories in the Nearctic goose populations against those of the western Palearctic. Population increases on both continents reminded me of