

is woefully so now. As hard as it is to imagine a book on cooperative breeding published today that fails to cite work by Nick Davies on Dunnocks (*Prunella modularis*), Andrew Cockburn and Steve Pruett-Jones on Malurus fairy-wrens, Jan Komdeur on Seychelles Warblers (*Acrocephalus seychellensis*), and Kerry Rabenold on *Campylorhynchus* wrens, here it is. As a result, the book is frighteningly inadequate unless one is aware of how the field has advanced since the book was first written.

This is not to say that the book lacks redeeming features. Skutch is not just a fine naturalist, he is possibly the greatest avian natural historian alive today. The fact that he is still active at 95 is nothing short of amazing. The ornithological community is truly fortunate that he has devoted so much of his life to observing Neotropical birds and that he has made his observations so accessible as a result of his prolific writings. Skutch's contributions are legion and include the first review of cooperative breeding (*Auk* 52:257–273, 1935), which was published long before most of us were born, much less old enough to hold binoculars and write field notes. The multitude of natural history observations reported and summarized in this book are part of his vast legacy and, as such, deserve publication despite the lack of a modern evolutionary perspective. I'd even go so far as to condone a reprint of the original edition, in spite of it being obsolete, as long as the publisher made it clear that this is what it was. However, passing the volume off as "an expanded edition" when nothing substantive had been expanded is sleazy. I can only recommend it if (1) you don't have the 1987 edition, and (2) you have a shelf of "Skutchiana" that needs filling out.—WALT KOENIG, *Hastings Reservation, University of California, 38601 East Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley, California 93924, USA.*

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**The American Robin.**—Roland H. Wauer. 1999. University of Texas Press. Austin. x + 93 pp., 14 color plates, 1 table, 2 maps. ISBN 0-292-79123-2. Cloth, \$17.95.—The American Robin is No. 39 in the slim, elegant volumes of natural history in the Corrie Herring Hooks Series by the University of Texas Press. Wauer's book, like others in this series, is written for a lay audience and summarizes the natural history of America's "most visible and beloved songbird," the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). Throughout the book, the author successfully weaves together personal observations, scientific facts, and obscure tidbits of information that make *The American Robin* delightful reading. Its relatively short length and

clear, concise writing make it easy material to absorb. I would recommend the book to anyone who is interested in a basic introduction to robin natural history. The book is composed of 10 chapters, each of which addresses different aspects of robin biology ranging from basic descriptions of appearance to the robin's enemies and threats.

In Chapter 1, the author introduces the robin as America's most well-known songbird: "It is as American as apple pie, baseball, and the Stars and Stripes." Our familiarity with this species stems from the widespread distribution of robins throughout North America and their successful adaptability to human-dominated landscapes. Wauer reminds us that we have all experienced close encounters with robins, whether watching them hunt earthworms on our lawns or listening to their cheerful and familiar song. The author provides some of his own interesting experiences with robins that caused him to take up birding as a hobby and natural history as a career (he is a retired National Park Service park interpreter, scientist, and resource specialist). As a result, he refers to the robin as his "spark bird." The introductory chapter concludes with a section on the robin's "claim to fame" by mentioning some well-known popular references to the species, such as the color "robin's-egg blue," and song titles, lyrics, and numerous nursery rhymes that refer to robins. Unfortunately, as the author correctly acknowledges, the cited nursery rhymes most likely refer to the unrelated European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*).

Chapter 2 is brief and offers facts and fiction about robins, including some useful information such as estimated life span, wingspan, body mass, and clutch size. Wauer also provides some interesting (not-so-useful?) and hard-to-find tidbits, such as the fact that the robin has approximately 2,900 feathers on its body (how did he know this?)! I was also unclear on how to interpret the fact that 2,200 to 3,300 cycles per second reportedly have been found in the robin's song. This section would have been more useful if metric measurements had also been provided, especially because mass is given in both ounces and grams a few pages later in the book (p. 13). The next section addresses the derivation of the robin's name, which I found to be an interesting interpretation. I had always thought the American Robin was given its name by the British because its red breast reminded them of the European Robin back home. According to Wauer, however, it was the American Robin's behavior, rather than its plumage, that reminded early settlers of the European Robin. The scientific name, *Turdus migratorius*, is well described in a simple and accurate manner. The chapter ends by providing numerous excerpts from historical legends and folklore that mention the robin. I found "non-scientific" inclusions like these to be particularly interesting and to greatly enhance the readability of the book. The chapter's final quote from Shake-

spere, who refers to the "ruddock," is definitely a reference to the "British robin" and not the American species.

Chapter 3 describes the robin's appearance, flight, voice, physiology, and senses. Throughout this chapter, Wauer compares various aspects of the robin (e.g. body mass, flight speed, body temperature) with other familiar bird species. I thought this was particularly useful, especially for the readers for whom this book is primarily intended. Again, some interesting facts are mentioned, such as the observation that both males and females apparently sing. Unfortunately, the author doesn't provide any citations for these poorly documented facts, so the reader is unable to follow up on these points. I was often left wondering, here and elsewhere throughout the book, whether the observations being reported were from the author's personal experiences or from the scientific literature. Toward the end of this chapter (sections on physiology and senses), much of the information refers to birds in general rather than specifically to robins. Again, the lay audience will appreciate this more than the avian research biologist who might be looking for specific information on robins.

Chapter 4 describes the distribution of the robin, which can be found from shoreline to above tree line throughout North America. The author provides several quotes from previous works that document the robin's range expansion since the early 1900s and separates this chapter into summer and winter distributions. The comment that the robin is one of the few native species to have benefitted from human development is a good one. Maps of the breeding and wintering distributions are derived from Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data, respectively. A review of BBS and CBC data helps complete this chapter. However, readers who are unfamiliar with interpreting such maps might find them confusing because the numbers provided in the legend on both maps lack units. As noted by the author, robins appears to be stable or increasing throughout their range. Not mentioned, however, is the fact that some western populations are clearly declining (e.g. in the Sierra Nevadas and the Northern Rockies, as well as in Oregon and California).

Despite the fact that Chapter 5 is only two pages long, it is an important contribution to the book. Here, the author puts the robin in perspective with other North American thrushes (subfamily Turdinae), specifically the genus *Turdus*. Most readers, even professional ornithologists, will appreciate this brief diversion into thrush taxonomy. Using the sixth edition of the AOU's "Check-list of North American Birds," Wauer ends the chapter with a useful table that lists all species of the genus *Turdus* that breed in North America. These have remained unchanged in the AOU's recently published seventh edition of the check-list. The scientific name of the Bare-eyed Robin (*Turdus nudigenis*) is misspelled in the table. Al-

though perhaps beyond the scope of the book and its intended audience, an appropriate addition to this chapter would have been some discussion of the seven subspecies of *Turdus migratorius* itself.

In Chapter 6, Wauer does an excellent job of summarizing the complex behaviors of robins. We perhaps know more about this aspect of robin natural history than any other. In the section on feeding, Wauer clearly describes the familiar behavior of a robin foraging for invertebrates on a lawn. The classic "head-cock" and "bill-pounce" behaviors are described eloquently. When they feed in this way, robins actually are foraging by sight and not sound, and Wauer's review of studies that support this idea is excellent. The rest of this section is devoted to a thorough description of major food items in the robin's diet. Other sections in this chapter cover bathing, preening, anting, flocking, and roosting and include Wauer's interesting personal observations. Wauer uses these personal experiences to portray some poorly studied aspects of robin behavior; e.g. he is convinced that robins bathe twice daily, once in the morning and once in the afternoon.

Chapter 7 is entitled "Life History" and is by the far the longest chapter in the book. The author begins with an introductory section on the concept of life history and reproduction. Again, some useful comparisons, this time of maximum known ages, with other well-known bird species are provided. The robin's life history (or "breeding cycle") is broken down into seven sections: migration, territory, courtship, nest building, egg laying, incubation, and care of young. The section on migration focuses on spring (i.e. arrival on breeding grounds). Oddly, however, the discussion of fall migration, which is more complex than a simple shift southward, was not included. The use of quotes in this section also seemed a little excessive. In contrast, the section on territory and territory defense is enjoyable and well researched. I wish the author had provided the citation for his interesting observation that older (experienced) males are the first to arrive on the breeding grounds and obtain territories, and that inexperienced males usually must settle for suboptimal sites. The section on courtship, primarily a collection of quotes from previous works, is a pleasant reminder of how classic writers such as Audubon and Bent once described birds and their behavior.

Because of its attention to detail, the next section on nest building is the strongest part of the chapter. I especially liked the various reports of unusual nest locations. The next two sections, egg laying and incubation, are straightforward. The statement that "egg-laying usually occurs in the early morning hours. . . ." is incorrect, however. Robins are, in fact, unusual among songbirds in that they lay their eggs late in the morning, or even during the early afternoon, rather than around sunrise. I also noticed one inconsistency in that the incubation period is quoted

as 11 to 14 days on page 62, yet 11 to 13 days on page 55. Published studies actually document an incubation period of 12 to 13 days or 12 to 14 days, depending on geographic location. The penultimate section of this chapter addresses care of young and makes for a delightful combination of scientific facts, fascinating tidbits, and well-written prose. I enjoyed learning things like "by the last day in the nest, a young robin may eat 14 feet of earthworms" and that several other bird species have been documented feeding young robins, both in and out of the nest! The final section in Chapter 7 on "associates" has limited usefulness, in my opinion, and is an unnecessary inclusion in what is already a relatively lengthy chapter.

Chapter 8 describes enemies and threats of robins and is packed with detailed information. The chapter contains seven sections: predators, competitors, brood parasites, overindulgence, weather, diseases, and human-caused deaths. The section on predators is a good one, despite going off on a tangent about a "Dear Abby" column concerning house cat reproduction. The sections on competitors and brood parasites are succinct and solid contributions to the chapter. The section on overindulgence captures the well-known observation of drunken robins that have ingested too much overripe (fermenting) fruit. The section on threats from weather includes an interesting example of mortality from a tornado, as well as a well-chosen quote from Leopold's (1966) "*A Sand County Almanac*." Robin deaths from disease are difficult to detect. As a result, the next section on diseases considers songbirds in general, but nevertheless is an excellent summary of available information. The use of cited literature is especially good in this section. Wauer begins the final section of this chapter, on human-caused deaths, by reminding us that such deaths are not only senseless, they are also illegal. This section is also enjoyable reading as it moves from a historical perspective to an elaborate discussion of the more recent devastating effects of DDT. It was the robin that became the symbol of the fight to stop the use of this deadly chemical, and the link between earthworm immunity to DDT and robin deaths is well made.

The author nears the end of the book (Chapter 9) with several suggestions on how to invite robins to your home. After reading about the natural history of the robin, I think this is a wonderful attempt to involve the lay audience in providing food, water, and nesting platforms for this species in their own backyards. The American Robin is not my "spark bird" (having grown up with the European Robin in my backyard), but building a nest box as a young child and watching a pair of birds (in my case, Eurasian Kestrels [*Falco tinnunculus*]) use it to successfully raise brood after brood had a significant influence on my choice of career. The author's early encounters with robins clearly show through in his en-

thusiasm for others to have similar personal experiences. Finally, although the artificial diet referred to by the author that was used in the 1960s probably worked perfectly well, a more recently developed banana-soy-protein-fruit diet ("banana mash") has become a standard for feeding robins during behavioral observations in captivity.

The final chapter (Chapter 10) provides highlights from the book with a one-page summary of the robin's characteristic features, adaptability, and familiarity that make it North America's most widespread, visible, and beloved songbird. As such, it is a fitting close to a fascinating book. Following the closing chapter is a bibliography that allows the reader to follow up on references to previous works that are made throughout the book. Although many of the references in the text are made only casually (often, only names are provided, but not dates), the reader should have little trouble identifying the corresponding citation in the bibliography. Finally, the color photographs throughout the book are excellent and enhance its appearance and readability considerably. This book belongs in all university and community libraries, as well in the personal collections of ornithologists interested in learning more about the basic natural history of the American Robin.—  
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**A Guide to the Birds and Mammals of Coastal Patagonia.**—Graham Harris. 1998. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. xviii + 231 pp., 33 color plates, 30 figures, 251 distribution maps. ISBN 0-691-05831-8. Cloth, \$65.00.—This interesting book is a hybrid in several ways. Its hard cover and size render it rather awkward as a field guide, but it is a nice addition to a personal bookshelf. Its scope encompassing birds and mammals renders it "half interesting" to pure ornithologists or to pure mammalogists. Contents include descriptions, status, and ranges of terrestrial and marine birds and mammals, all elements useful for bird watchers and whale watchers. The book provides insightful comments on habitat and behavior, areas of much interest to ecologists. Its concentration on the coastal strip of Patagonia provides a detailed picture of that specific meeting of sea and land but consequently fails at setting a proper biogeographic context. In addition, its small print throughout is an insult to the tired eyes of bird watchers and reviewers alike. Although I read