

Caravan Park (located in a remnant patch of forest that still hosts breeding Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfishers [*Tanysiptera sylvia*] in the austral summer), but it omits the better birding and chance for a wild Southern Cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius*) at nearby Cassowary House, a bed-and-breakfast operated by expert local birders. To be sure, Cassowary House is more expensive, but the chance for a cassowary and birding in virgin forest may be worth the price for some travelers (their web site is <www.cassowary-house.com.au>). Wheatley's text is perhaps too narrowly aimed at the "independent budget birder," as he addresses his audience.

By far the weakest link is the bibliography. Alden and Gooders' book had a fine selection of literature, but this new effort has barely 1.5 pages. Although admitting that it is meant only as an initial "guiding light," *Where to Watch Birds* omits numerous more-focused spotlights found in the specialized bird-finding guides. Not everything is available in individual trip reports or on the web; at a minimum, the bibliography should have included references such as Wieneke's (1995) *Where to Find Birds in Northeast Queensland* and Chambers' (1989) *Birds of New Zealand, Locality Guide*. The short list of "useful books" fails to mention such crucial texts for New Guinea as Coates' two-volume (1985, 1990) *The Birds of Papua New Guinea*, or such resources as Beehler's (1978) *Upland Birds of Northeastern New Guinea* and Diamond's (1972) *Avifauna of the Eastern Highland of New Guinea*. The listing of "family" books omits the marvelous monograph on fairy-wrens by Schodde (1982) and the classic books on birds of paradise (i.e. Gilliard 1969, Cooper and Forshaw 1977, Firth and Beehler 1998). Instead, recent "cookie cutter" volumes from Pica Press and others are favored. Throughout, there may be too much emphasis on the here and now and too little appreciation for the work that has gone on before. Yet, even this attitude is nicely balanced by an eloquent introductory discussion of conservation in this part of the world.

Overall, *Where to Watch Birds in Australasia and Oceania* is a very fine effort that is packed with indispensable information for travelers. Accuracy is quite high, and optimism even higher! I enjoyed reading the personal stories and the entertaining Briticisms (like the "really cracking" endemics on Maui, or the emphasis on finding the local brew with which to celebrate at day's end). There are indices to bird species (by English names only; an index of scientific names should have been included) and to sites. Given that it contains 448 pages and a hard cover, the book is remarkably lightweight, so carrying it will not unduly burden one's baggage. I highly recommend it to the traveling birdwatcher anywhere within the huge scope of its coverage.—DON ROBERSON, 282 Grove Acre, Pacific Grove, California 93950, USA.

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**Birding in the American West: A Handbook.**—Kevin J. Zimmer. 2000. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York. x + 402 pages, 111 text figures. ISBN 0-8014-3257-X. Cloth, \$49.95. ISBN 0-8014-8328-X. Paper, \$25.00.—This indeed is a handbook in name and size, but it is well suited as a "handy book" for many reasons. The pages are packed with useful information for North American birders of just about any orientation or level of accomplishment except, perhaps, for the few so advanced as to be qualified to research and write such a formidable work themselves. Although definitely focused on the West, this volume would be of value even to those easterners who may never intend (heaven forbid!) to visit the West in pursuit of its birdlife. The author's definition of "West" includes the 18 continental states west of the line running from the eastern border of North Dakota and intervening states to Texas. However, with respect to scope of content, Zimmer departs from the conventional.

Approximately one-fourth of the book (Chapter 5)

comprises what one would expect from the title, namely, help with locating 268 selected "western specialty" bird species. The vast 18-state western area encompasses the great majority of all avian species to be found in the entire United States, and the region provides a great range of excellent opportunities for birding. This volume has the merit of making more data on localities for the "western specialties" readily accessible than can be gleaned from range maps in field guides. Obviously, less detail is included than in the many western state or local bird-finding guides. Any novice eastern birder planning a western expedition could use this chapter profitably to avoid consulting numerous bird-finding guides, but more widely read birders might see the less-detailed information in Zimmer's volume extraneous.

The assembling of bird-finding locality data across 18 states was a daunting task that drew upon a great many published sources as well as the author's personal experiences. For such a compilation to be error-free would be most remarkable and unexpected, but my personal familiarity with an area calls forth the mention of at least one discrepancy. The Wichita Mountains of southwestern Oklahoma do not extend beyond Comanche County into Caddo, Canadian, and Blaine counties north of the Wichitas, as cited on page 352; what all these areas have in common is habitat suitable for the endangered Black-capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapillus*).

Not so expected is that 50% (Chapter 4) of the handbook is devoted to aids for correctly making many of the more difficult identifications (e.g. the three larger *Sterna*; *Myiarchus* and *Empidonax* flycatchers; *Aphelocoma* jays; the wing-barred vireos; Bendire's Thrasher [*Toxostoma bendirei*] versus Curve-billed Thrasher [*T. curvirostre*]). Certainly, these aids would be a great benefit on a western trip. Moreover, because many of the problems within pairs or groups of species also occur upon occasion in the American East, Chapter 4 has considerable value wherever one pursues birds in the United States or Canada. These 200 pages can be seen as taking the user beyond the field guides, and even a step beyond what was provided in Kenn Kaufman's 1990 *Guide to Advanced Birding*, to which Zimmer contributed the chapter on Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*). This chapter benefits from excellent line drawings by Shawneen Finnegan, Dale Zimmerman, and Mimi Hoppe Wolf that compare two or more species. The black-and-white photos, mostly by the widely traveled author (a leader of far-ranging bird tours) or by Barry Zimmer, further aid the aspiring advanced birder. The valuable bibliography of 206 citations extends from 1951 to 1999, but with only a few after 1996. Most of the citations are identification articles in journals such as *Birding*, *American Birds*, *Western Birds*, and even a few from *British Birds*. Others are mainly local, state, and regional bird-finding guides,

going back to O. S. Pettingill's (1951, 1981) pioneering eastern and western guides, and the various identification field guides.

Perhaps most unexpected from the title is that nearly 20% of the book, in the first three chapters, consists of fundamental material describing how to be a good birder. In some respects, this seems to be a three-chapter précis of a semester nonmajor course in introductory ornithology. Chapter 1, "Techniques of Finding Birds," offers a fundamental, but by no means simplistic, introduction to the birding pursuit. It deals with the role that habitats, key plants, elevation, life zones, nest-site availability, time of day, season, and migration may play in birding in a succinct but informative way, providing a sound foundation for the novice to build upon. This chapter also deals with published and electronic sources of information (e.g. rare bird alerts accessible via telephone with numbers listed for the West, or the Internet) for locating rare species. Zimmer even provides an introduction to pelagic birding, describes methods of calling in birds by audio aids, and then goes very appropriately into ethics for birder field behavior. The latter is a topic with increasing significance as numbers of birders continue to swell.

Chapter 2, "Techniques of Identifying Birds," continues where concise field identification guides stop. This chapter teaches the approaches to correctly identifying most of the birds one encounters, and Chapter 4 deals with the remaining species. Chapter 2 also includes a thumbnail sketch of all the avian families encountered in the West. It closes with a desirable section on "Psychological Influences," cautioning the birder against allowing enthusiasm to overwhelm good judgement in "identifying" rare species when one's basis for identification may be inadequate, often leading to an "unsanitary" report and a pain for the bird records committee to deal with.

The third and shortest chapter, "Keeping Field Notes," is a well-chosen segue away from decrying careless over-enthusiasm in bird identification toward exhorting birders to cultivate the habit of making excellent field notes, an essential skill for producing desirable "sanitary" identifications. These first three chapters could serve to transform a person with a very casual approach to birding into a well-disciplined candidate for "advanced birder."

As many students of North American birding browse this book, they will enjoy being reminded of or finding anew the numerous useful and interesting items of information on birding places and bird species of the American West. It is tempting to suggest that it is a "goldmine" deserving of exploration, discovery and the extraction of delightful "nuggets." It is well worth the cost for any active birder to add it to his or her library. It should be favorably recommended for purchase by any library that covers

North American birds.—W. MARVIN DAVIS, 308 *Lewis Lane, Oxford, Mississippi 38655, USA.*

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**Chasing Warblers.**—Vera Thornton and Bob Thornton. 1999. University of Texas Press, Austin. x + 148 pp., 90 color photographs, 1 map. ISBN 0-292-78162-8. Cloth, \$40.00. ISBN 0-292-781636. Paper, \$19.95.—Bill and Vera Thornton take the reader along on their nine-year odyssey to locate and photograph all 52 wood-warbler species that regularly nest in North America. Although they did not start out to do so, somewhere along the journey an amus-

ing hobby became a serious endeavor. Each chapter retraces their successes and shortfalls from the time that the Thorntons locate and photograph their first warbler in Texas in 1987 until the last one near Jama, Mexico, in 1996. Included in this entertaining account are dozens of important behavioral observations about each warbler species that will enhance any birder's warbler knowledge and increase his or her likelihood of catching a glimpse or perhaps even photographing these sometimes-elusive birds.

As the Thorntons chase warblers from Mexico to Canada, from sea to shining sea, through meadows and bogs, up mountains and into dense woods, the reader is introduced to many of the dedicated individuals from all walks of life encountered along the journey. Never far from their thoughts is their deep concern about habitat destruction in the Neotropical wintering grounds of Central America and the summer nesting grounds in North America. The photographs taken by Vera Thornton are nothing short of awe-inspiring. Each location and bird is documented, and details regarding the methods used to obtain these photographs are included in the text.

Overall, this book is an inspiring winter read in anticipation of one of spring's most captivating group of visitors, and Vera Thornton has already lowered the gauntlet for the next adventure, chasing the warblers of Mexico.—SANDRA WALSH-PAPALIA, *Department of Biology, Life Science Building, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, South Carolina 29733, USA.*