

BIRDERS' BOOKSHELF

Distributional Checklist of North American Birds

David DeSante and Peter Pyle. Illustrations by F. P. Bennett, Jr. and Keith Hansen. Artemisia Press, P.O. Box 119, Lee Vining, CA 93541. Telephone 619-647-6496. 1986. 456 pp., 51 black-and-white drawings. Harbound \$30. Available from Artemisia Press.

OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS AN EVER-increasing number of schemes and devices by which birders can catalog and tabulate the birds they see has come into existence. Traditionally, everyone has a scheme that will not work because any scheme that depends on human reliability is unreliable. Blessed inertia usually influences established technology to persist in spite of new technology, so many of us still keep track of our bird sightings on the backs of cocktail napkins, deposit bank tickets, or the envelope the latest utility bill came in. They burn with the untidiness of real life. Some have gone so far as to discover the ubiquitous 3" x 5" lined index card and set up an arbitrary bookkeeping system using them. The permutations are endless! The business of record keeping is by no means simple.

If you are tired of numerous and varied bit-lists, take heart, because in designing their book, DeSante and Pyle have smoothed the way for easy listing. Retaining permanent records of observations in all of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and all 12 of the Canadian territories and provinces should now be relatively painless.

The tome makes good its name with distribution information on the status and abundance of 975 bird species (all arranged in *A.O.U. Check-list* order). These data are provided by a series of codes for each species in each state and province. The telegraphic designations are applied uniformly to all species. The organization of the *Distributional Checklist* accommodates a matrix format on a 8½" x 11" page. This layout allows 24 or fewer species presented on

a single page plus an additional six pages to present the complete matrix of discrete geographical areas for each species. This has the advantage of easily accessing all possible combinations of each species in each state or province. The areas are arranged roughly from northwest to southeast to facilitate regional comparisons. There is additional space provided for the birder to add new spe-

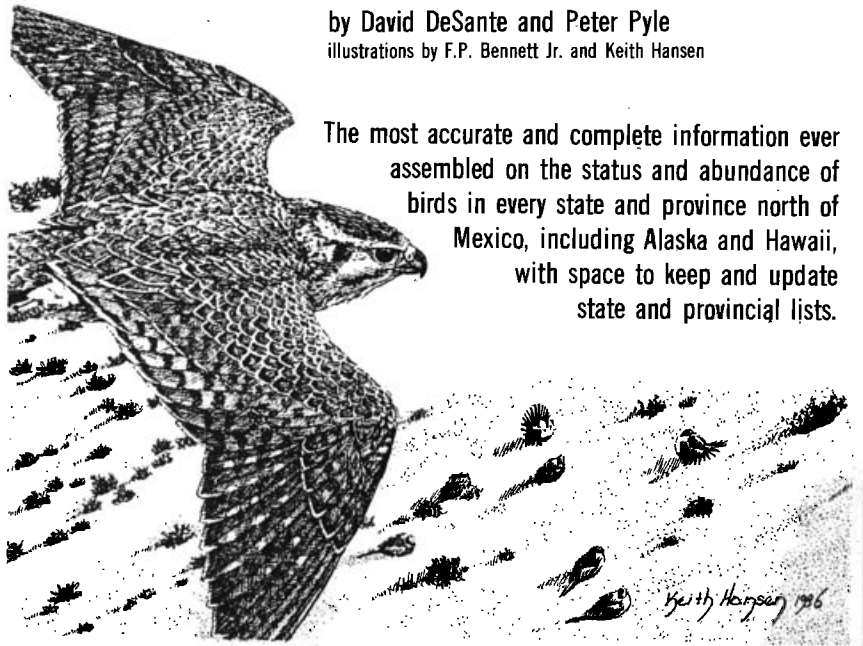
cies to state, province, and North American lists as they occur, plus ample space for a variety of personal lists. A useful bibliography is included at the end of the book whose titles all pertain to bird distribution in North America.

The threefold aim of the book appears to be well met: it is a compendium of state and provincial bird lists, it enables bird enthusiasts to keep current

Distributional Checklist of NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS

by David DeSante and Peter Pyle

illustrations by F.P. Bennett Jr. and Keith Hansen



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...Chandler S. Robbins

456 pages hardbound; 8½ x 11; 51 drawings; color cover. \$30 (includes shipping and handling; Calif. residents add \$1.80 sales tax). Phone orders welcome.

ARTEMISIA PRESS, P.O. BOX 119, LEE VINING, CA 93541; (619) 647-6386.

general and location-specific lists with minimum care, and, it provides complete and precise status and abundance information for every species in every political unit within its defined scope. To achieve those goals in a single, albeit quite large, volume is no small triumph. DeSante and Pyle are to be congratulated for implementing a mammoth undertaking.

A project of this scope is never done without the help of a host of talented field people. The authors acknowledge 156 individuals, each of whom is expert in his or her region, if not continent-wide. This roster was of extreme interest to me. Of the total, there are no fewer than 66 current or past AMERICAN BIRDS' Regional Editors or Christmas Bird Count Regional Editors, another 32 sub-regional editors, and at least another dozen authors of articles that have appeared in AMERICAN BIRDS. We might conclude that a minimum of 70% of the investigation and fact-checking for this impressive book was done by AB's superlative contributors. No wonder the *Distributional Checklist* is meticulous in its status and abundance data.

The book is chockablock full of distribution information, but is nonetheless visually appealing, with more than 50 black-and-white full-page drawings by F. P. Bennett and Keith Hansen distributed throughout. In this issue of AMERICAN BIRDS we have featured some of their compositions from the book. The number reproduced here is less than one-half the total. In our most recent Christmas Bird Count issue (Volume 40, Number 4), we reproduced 12 more of Bennett's works from the book and the Front Cover of that issue, done by Keith Hansen, first appeared in the *Distributional Checklist*.

This is a volume for novice or veteran, amateur or professional. It outdistances the glut of schemata on the market.—S.R.D.

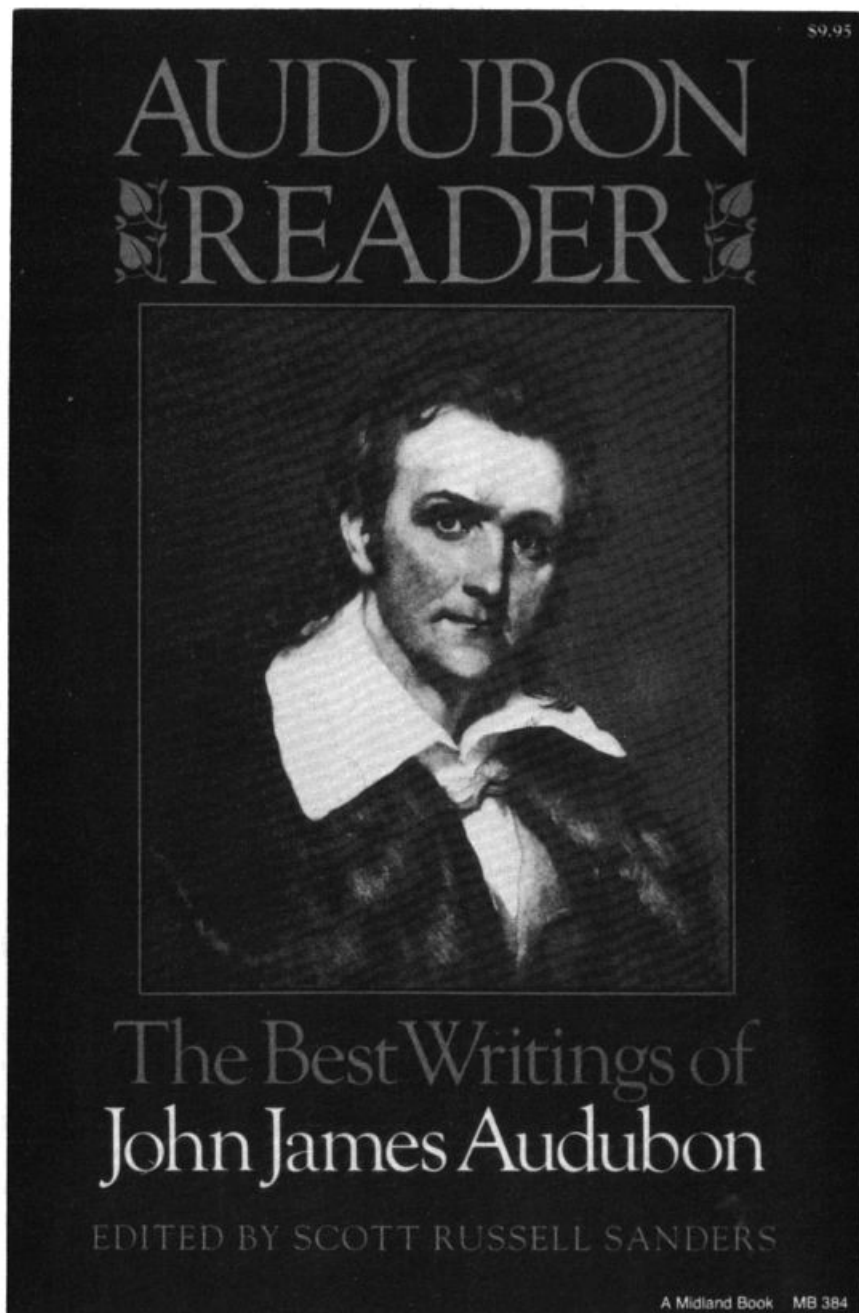
We thank the following book reviewers for their careful reading and comments. The initials at the end of each review correspond to these names: Susan Roney Drennan, Fredrick Baumgarten, Hugh E. Kingery, and Henry T. Armistead.

Audubon Reader: the Best Writings of John James Audubon

Edited by Scott Russell Sanders. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana. 1986. 245 pages. Hardbound \$29.95, paperbound, \$9.95.

AS SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS ASSERTS in the introduction to this book, the work of John James Audubon is known to the general public almost exclusively through his art, and then mainly by the set of color prints which comprise his

seminal *Birds of America*. Few celebrities have had one aspect of their achievements so thoroughly segregated from others. Typically, the prose of more "modern" ornithologists has supplanted Audubon's. Thus a 1950 pocket-size edition of the *Birds of America* contains an introduction and "descriptive captions" by the late Ludlow Griscom, while in 1978, more than a quarter-century later, a poster-sized book of prints features text by Roger Tory Peterson. These are certainly renowned ornithologists in their own right; but, is Audubon's own writing being unfairly neglected?



In the *Audubon Reader*, Mr Sanders has undertaken the worthy task of letting Audubon speak for himself, and he has done a creditable job of bringing to the fore Audubon's gifts as a writer, in an abridged form that is certain to appeal to a broad reading audience. The book is a collection of Audubon's writings drawn from his letters and journals, his *Ornithological Biography*, and his "Episodes," the "true-life" tales which

“. . . the strength of the Audubon Reader lies in its broad representation of the famous naturalist's life and pursuits . . .”

Audubon included in the *Biography* to enliven it. There is not much new or even particularly insightful in this collection, nor is this in any sense an authoritative version. To the extent that it illuminates the strengths and vividness of Audubon's style, and allows us a welcome overview of the naturalist, woodsman, and eccentric, it attains its modest goal.

The smartly composed essay that introduces the work touches upon a number of little-explored facets of Audubon and his times. Sanders talks about the literary and linguistic foundations underlying Audubon's writing: the authors most widely read in Audubon's day (Cooper, Irving); the "polyglot" nature of spoken American English; the conscious use of the "romantic landscape" in Audubon's imagery; and the naturalist-writers of succeeding generations who have relied upon Audubon as their guide. Yet, perhaps in keeping with the limitations of a "popular" treatment, Mr. Sanders declines to mine the depths of these topics, instead passing from one to another in rapid succession. Intermixed is a rather uncritical appraisal of Audubon, to whom Sanders attributes a host of excellent qualities. He seems to accept Audubon's self-opinion at face value, agreeing with the painter, for instance, that all of his critics were mere "closet" naturalists. Perhaps elsewhere Mr. Sanders (an English professor at Indiana University) will take up the theme of the literary milieu surrounding Audubon and its full effect on his writings. Let us hope so.

Once into the text, the reader is mostly left to his own devices. Mr. Sanders, in keeping with his aim, provides few guideposts. On the whole this approach is commendable, but it results in several shortcomings, and a few inconsistencies. Sanders notes that Maria Audubon, the naturalist's granddaughter, edited Audubon's papers "without specifying how she chose what to include." Yet he goes on to make the exact same mistake. And why, after taking issue, justifiably, with Maria's infamous "cleansings" of Audubon's journals, does he mix in selections from these expurgated versions without comment? Readers might also benefit from knowing who Audubon's "Eccentric Naturalist" was (Rafinesque). Finally, some of the entries from the *Ornithological Biography* are cut short, while others are extended longer than seems necessary. Why did Sanders edit thus, and what type of material did he choose to delete? It seems unlikely that he brought together the most personal, the most informative, or even the most revealing of Audubon's writings. In the end, the strength of the *Audubon Reader* lies in its broad representation of the famous naturalist's life and pursuits, and in its usefulness as an introduction to an always intriguing character.

The value of the book rests squarely on the pen of Audubon himself. His achievements as a field ornithologist remain remarkable today, and their flavor and freshness are captured undiluted in his written word. The verity of his experiences in the wild and the sharpness of his vision more than make up for the occasional romantic excesses or unscientific lapses. Certain of his speculations may seem odd to current ornithologists, but many of Audubon's techniques were relatively modern, and carried out with care. Sanders includes several examples, among them the banding of young Eastern Phoebes, from which Audubon discovered that successive generations nest close to their original fledging site; and numerous instances of dissecting birds' gizzards to determine feeding habits. There can be little doubt that Audubon left behind a strong foundation for much of our knowledge of American birds.

A more difficult proposition is encountered when trying to reconcile Audubon's love for birds, and his growing concern (particularly in his later years) for the survival of species, with his con-

spicuous overzealous bird killing. Audubon's account of the American Avocet provides a typical yet stark case in point. After a beautiful, vivid account of observing females at their nests, in which Audubon cannot help "sympathizing" with one bird, as, at his approach "poor thing—off she scrambles—running, tumbling, and at last rising on the wing, emitting her clicking notes of grief and anxiety. . . .", he concludes with, "having, as I thought, obtained all desirable knowledge of these birds, I shot down five of them, among which I unfortunately found three females. . . ."

In light of this apparent contradiction, Sanders acutely concludes that we see in Audubon "four rival identities—the hunter, exulting in triumph over his prey; the artist, enjoying the play of colors; the scientist, observing behavior; and the nature lover, regretting the death of something beautiful." Other commentators have similarly treated this problem, citing hunting practices current in Audubon's years. Still, one has an unsettled feeling about the obsessive quality inherent in Audubon's view that to see and understand is to have and own, not to mention his inability to perceive any connection between these incompatible philosophies.

“The value of the book rests squarely on the pen of Audubon himself.”

Perhaps a clue can be found in Audubon's irrepressible personality, the very essence of which bursts through on every page of the *Audubon Reader*. Here is a man who not only willfully set out to conquer a portion of the little known American wilderness, but who also took extraordinary pride in his ability to know and traverse the land itself, as if it were his own—every canebrake, every river crossing, every inhabitant, human or animal. And if Audubon's methods were, at times, questionable, they were at least motivated by the purest and simplest of emotions—a love of birds.

The *Audubon Reader* closes with a brief but not complete bibliography of works by and about Audubon. One hopes that readers will turn to these and other works of Audubon, to which this book has thoughtfully introduced us.—F.B.

Seven Half-miles from Home: Notes of a Wind River Naturalist

Mary Back. Introduction by Margaret Murie. Johnson Publishing Company, 1880 South 57th Court, Boulder, Colorado 80301. 1985. 186 pages, 20 black & white line drawings by the author. Softbound \$9.95.

MARY BACK HAS SENT HER BIRD OBSERVATIONS to the Mountain West Regional Editors of *American Birds* for at least 20 years. Always literate, always observant, she has enhanced our knowledge of northwestern Wyoming's birdlife. Now she explains, in this journal, how she made all of those observations—in seven different half-mile walks from her home on the Wind River in Dubois.

“Always literate, always observant, she has enhanced our knowledge of northwestern Wyoming's birdlife.”

Her journal consists of vivid vignettes about birds, animals, and plants. In one, she describes walking through the cottonwoods along the river and hearing a nighthawk call. She discovered it roosting on the limb of a cottonwood, and subsequently found it roosting in the same place every day for the whole summer. Nighthawks nest away from the trees, among the sagebrush in her “desert,” so that finding one roosting in the trees surprised her.

She says she “cannot quite believe in chickadees. Their cheery bounce in bitter weather is not only unreasonable, it's incredible.” She says, “Wrens must be the most efficient insecticides of our woods.” She describes a junior flicker loudly demanding that his parents feed him as he sat on a suet feeder. Her husband Joe named a pair of White-breasted Nuthatches (her favorite feeder birds), Picaroon and Picarette. A picaroon is a woodpile tool which, when driven into a log, makes a handle with



From *Seven Half-miles from Home*. Illustration/Mary Back.

which to move the log. The nuthatches drive their beaks into nutshells somewhat like a logger driving a picaroon into a log, hence the name.

Mary has graced the book with 20

Mardy Murie says in the Introduction, “Mary Back is an artist; she sees her world with an artist's eye. [She serves up] a treasury of information with humor, perception, and whimsi-

“. . . vivid vignettes about birds, animals, and plants.”

sketches. Particularly good are her depictions of the nuthatches, baby Cedar Waxwings on a wild rose branch, and a Snowy Egret.

cality . . .” You'll enjoy this journal of observations if you like airy descriptions by an observant and sensitive, modest, and informed naturalist—H.E.K.

The Birdwatcher's Activity Book
Donald S. Heintzelman. Harrisburg,
Pennsylvania, Stackpole Books. 1983.
250 pages, index, bibliography, 72 black
& white photographs, 5 text figures, 1
map. Paperbound \$11.95.

THIS TITLE GOES INTO MORE DETAIL than its predecessor Manual, focusing in some depth, and much more successfully, on selected topics. There are referenced chapters (including 21 citations from the author's other works) on: Bird-Watching Basics, Enjoying Bird Behavior, the Birdwatcher and Ecological Isolation, Locality Bird Watching, Projects with Waterfowl, Projects with Birds of Prey, City Bird Watching, Experimental Bird Feeding, Collecting Bird-related Items, Locally Endangered Species Projects, and Promoting Bird Appreciation. In each chapter the author explains and cites previous studies

“. . . a thoughtful title which deserves wide use, especially in schools, colleges and bird clubs.”

the reader might use as an example or as the basis for a similar project of his or her own. The most original chapters are city bird watching, with emphasis on easily seen urban birds, city parks, museums and zoos; a promotional chapter stressing ways we can boost birds (special events, radio, TV, even wearing T-shirts and shoulder patches is a form of bird public relations; and a chapter on collectibles (stamps, decoys and other carvings, art, autographs, post

cards). A few of the ins and outs of book collecting would have improved this last chapter. Appendix One is a life history outline based on Nice's classic Song Sparrow study and Appendix Two lists the addresses of all state (but no Canadian provincial) wildlife agencies.

This is a thoughtful title which deserves wide use, especially in schools, colleges and bird clubs. It should help many birders who may have a tendency to be too preoccupied with counting, censusing, listing and surveying, to expand their range of birding interests.—H.T.A.

Hawks and Owls of North America: a Complete Guide to North American Birds of Prey

Donald S. Heintzelman. Universe Books, New York. 1979. viii, 197 pages, index, bibliography; 62 black & white photographs, 8 color photographs, 1 map, 1 diagram. Hardbound \$20.

AIMED AT A GENERAL AUDIENCE, this work contains basic information on all North American raptors, including marginal species such as Roadside Hawk, Eurasian Kestrel, King Vulture (since rejected by the *A.O.U. Check-list*, 6th edition) and Guadalupe Caracara (since treated as a race of the Crested Caracara in the *A.O.U. Check-list*, 6th edition).

Drawing heavily on his impressive experience in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, just over one-half of the text is devoted to species accounts. These brief overviews, approximately a page in

length, touch on the range, appearance, habitat and habits of each species. There are additional chapters on various raptor groups (e.g., accipiters, kites), as well as Raptor Ecology, Hawk Migrations, Owl Migrations, Fossil Hawks and Owls, Endangered Raptors, Increasing Raptor Populations, and Raptor Conservation Efforts, plus an appendix on Raptor Conservation Organizations.

“. . . an attractive once-over treatment for the public and lay audiences . . .”

Abundantly illustrated, many of the photographs were taken by the author and are full of the vitality, beauty and appeal of these breathtaking birds.

As an attractive once-over treatment for the public and lay audiences, this is a suitable and satisfactory book. Heintzelman's emphasis on conservation is also to be commended. However, a complete guide, it is not.—H.T.A.

A Manual for Bird Watching in the Americas

Donald S. Heintzelman. Universe Books, New York. 1979. 255 pages, index, bibliography; 141 black & white photographs, 16 color photographs, 4 maps. Paperbound \$9.95; hardbound \$17.95.

THIS IS NOT A COMPREHENSIVE MANUAL, but a potpourri of information on a selection of birding topics. This miscellaneous mix includes chapters on rare bird alerts, owl watching, birding equipment, references, checklists, life lists, backyard birding, seabirds, waterfowl and hawk watching. Coverage is uneven and erratic. The author draws heavily on his own experiences in Antarctica, the West Indies, and the north-eastern United States, citing himself 21 times in as many chapters.

Many sections are disappointingly incomplete. The chapter on organizations, for example, covers only 18 states and excludes Canada. "Breeding Bird Projects" makes no mention of the North American Breeding Bird Survey "United States Birding" is only 21 pages, 12 of which are thumbnail descriptions of a mere five national parks

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and eight national wildlife refuges. The Christmas Bird Count chapter is only five pages, one and one-half of which are devoted to the author's own Ant-arctica CBC. The chapter on Big Day Counts is five pages, one and one-half of which simply list the 229 species seen on April 28, 1973, a record-breaking day in Texas by Kenn Kaufman (*sic*) *et al.*

I cannot imagine a book with chapters on Christmas Bird Counts and Big Days not citing Roger Tory Peterson's classic and still marvelously readable and relevant chapters in *Birds Over America*.


Still, this book is abundantly and attractively illustrated and should serve to light a fire under many a beginner. But with a little more information and balance, it could have been so much better.—H.T.A.

Guide to Owl Watching in North America

Donald S. Heintzelman. Winchester Press (an imprint of New Century Publishers, Inc., Piscataway, New Jersey). 1984. xiii, 193 pages, index, bibliography, 65 black & white photographs, 1 drawing. Paperbound \$8.95.

THIS IS A COLLECTION OF GENERALLY good but basic information on owls, a perennially popular and charismatic group. It contains 65 good quality photographs of 19 species. Species accounts detail length, wingspread, field recognition, as well as a unique section on flight style, voice, nest, food, habitat and distribution. Most of this information is satisfactory, but some is so general as to be of little use. Thus the range of the Long-eared Owl is "Central Canada southward through the contiguous United States" (p. 21) and of the Northern Saw-whet Owl "Southern Canada southward through the contiguous United States except the southern states" (p. 25). These are overgeneralized, even misleading statements.

The author commendably urges caution in the use of tape players but even stronger emphasis on this, as well as the general vulnerability of owls, would have been desirable. In a sense, the best owl watching is no owl watching. I have seen a Common Barn-Owl killed by a stooping Osprey after being flushed




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from an offshore Chesapeake duck blind they shared; a Short-eared Owl driven into the sea by Herring Gulls following disturbance at its Virginia barrier island roost site; and tame Northern Saw-whet Owls harassed and sometimes illegally made pets, by birders at roosts that were too well known. One birder I know has ceased leading owl trips in the Washington, D.C. area because of unencouraged followup visits by trip participants. Extreme circumspection and discretion is the order of the daytime and should have been more emphasized here, especially since more

than one-third of this book is devoted to owl sites with sections on owls present, description and access. The sites that are listed are a curious hit or miss batch with many fine areas omitted, other obscure, minor ones included, and no listings at all for some 14 provinces and states. The bibliography and list of "owl conservation organizations," including raptor rehabilitation centers, are useful yet selective at best. In spite of such quibbling, the general public will probably get most of what they want from this book, but most advanced birders will not.—H.T.A.



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