BIRDERS' BOOKSHELF

Seabirds of the World: A Photographic Guide
Peter Harrison. The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington, MA. 317 pp.; 741 color photographs, 23 color illustrations; 24 pp. of black and white drawings called "Tubenose Identification Keys"; table of contents; index; $24.95 (Christopher Helm, London £15.95.)

IT'S BEEN A SCANT FIVE YEARS since Peter Harrison published the first edition of his seminal *Seabirds: An Identification Guide* and, now, the world's foremost seabirder tempts us with another tubenose tome. Do you *really* need to buy this new book? Well, if you're at all interested in seabirds, and I do emphasize the *Procellariiformes*, Harrison's new, seabird "pocket guide" is a must purchase.

No doubt, this is the unabashed endorsement of an ardent pelagic-birding junkie. Worse, the potential for inflation is even greater because I had some involvement with the book (a couple of my photos were chosen for publication and, because I often work with Peter, I had many discussions with him about the project). Having stated the connections, I'm going to plunge ahead anyway, because the bias is clear and there's a chance, perhaps, to add some perspective.

Harrison succeeded rather handsomely with his stated intention, namely, to produce a "pocket-sized book with the finest and largest collection of seabird photographs ever published." Included are rare, first-time-published pictures of such pelagic rarities as Fiji Petrel, Barau's Petrel, and Amsterdam Albatross. Harrison went for "substance," which in some cases meant blurry photos that happened to show important field marks, rare species, or important flight configurations or attitudes. Obviously, such a book is limited by the material that was submitted and available. Some of the photographs are not technically perfect, but Harrison offers a challenge to submit "better" photos to improve the next edition.

On its face, it's a very attractive volume. Enclosed within the well-bound, spiffily designed covers are 741 photos of 320 seabird species or forms, four-to-six on each page, taken by some of the world's leading seabird (and other) photographers. Where photos of particular species could not be found, Harrison's color illustrations are used. The photos are beautifully reproduced, and the layout is very easy on the eye. Each page is designed carefully: all seabirds facing the same way, with originals blown-up or reduced so that the seabirds appear to be the appropriate, relative to one another size. Some of this is very valuable, particularly the photos of the very difficult gadfly petrels, genus *Pterodroma*, all close at hand and readily available for comparison. The book's photo section is followed by short species accounts and up-to-date distribution maps, all of which are well cross-referenced.

There are many photos from four excellent photographers in particular—Bob Pitman, Ed Mackrill (also a major contributor to Grant's *Gulls: A Guide To Identification*), Jim Enticott, and Richard Webster. It's nice to see these efforts getting suitable and notice. Also, Harrison should be commended for the years-long task of soliciting the wealth of materials from which the book's photos were chosen. Harrison considered this a collaborative project, and all of the photographers share royalties.

Many, but certainly not all, of the photos are labeled as to the seabird's age and the time of year the photo was taken. These labels seem mostly correct, although there is room for argument, an example being the adult Northern Gannet that still has some black color in the tail and secondaries. Generally absent, though, are photographic locations, so with respect to species having widely varying subspecific plumages (*e.g.*, Herring Gull), the non-specialist reader might be misled. On gulls, there's another matter: all plumages are not shown, which might generate quibbling about a "lack" of completeness. It bears repeating, as stated in the introduction, that Harrison did not intend the pocket guide to be a reference work, deferring in-depth analysis to Grant's *Gulls A Guide to Identification*, the standard for Western Palearctic and North American gull identification, and to his own *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*. However, the seabird pocket guide is the only place to find full color photos of rarities like Relict and Chinese Blackheaded Gulls.

Nonetheless, let's remember that real birds eat fish, and it's the *Procellariiformes* that are the "stars" of this pocket guide. Photos aside, an exceptional aspect of this book—and a substantial reason why you should buy it—is the 24-page, black-and-white "Tubenose Identification Keys" that appear near the rear of the book. The keys cover the 26 genera of tubenoses, which Harrison really knows very well, and the specific field marks for each species are noted by the Peterson-type arrows to which we've grown accustomed. These drawings are excellent, are generally better than Harrison's earlier drawings, and reveal Harrison's positive evolution as a seabird artist. (Speaking of identification "keys," space limitations prevented the reprinting of the excellent black-and-white frigatebird keys from *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*; my suggestion is to photocopy these valuable drawings and glue them into your pocket guide for field reference.)

The species accounts for abbreviated, and not as complete as those found in *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, but some recently described marks like diving-petrel leg color and the potentially diagnostic central-tail projection ("thumbprints") of South Polar Skuas are noted. For the growing number of birders wanting to use "jizz" as a field identification tool, Harrison's introductory discussion ("Seabird Orders") describes many of the flight and feeding characters shown by each seabird family, then notes particular field marks on which to concentrate when sorting through the identification contenders in each family.

Finally, some comments about the publishing facts of life, and what this pocket guide really is and is not. The copy that I reviewed was the European

edition, published by Christopher Helm The North American version, published by Stephen Greene Press, has the unfortunate title *A Field Guide to the Seabirds of the World.* It certainly isn't a field guide in the modern sense of the term and, clearly, was not intended as such, there being no feasible way to condense the wealth of information found in *Seabirds: An Identification Guide.* The North American title was part of the price for moving ahead on this side of the Atlantic, but creates the wrong impression. The European title—*Seabirds of the World: A Photographic Guide*—more accurately reflects the thrust. Taken solely as a photo collection and black-and-white visual key, it is a treasure trove of useful information.

Another problem with the North American edition (at least the copies I've seen) is the publisher's failure to include the errata sheet that accompanies the European edition. So, for the record, here are corrections that are on the errata sheet overseas (the author's preferred caption is stated):

p. 110, photo 424 Arctic Skua (Pale morph)
p. 112, photo 431 Pomarine Skua (Adult transitional)
p. 116, photo 452 Lesser Black-backed Gull (ssp. *graellsii*)
p 118, photo 465 Western Gull (1st Winter, 2nd Winter)
p. 119, photo 469 Yellow-footed Gull (Juvenile; August)
p. 125, photo 505 Franklin's Gull (1st Summer; May)
p 129, photo 529 Sabine's Gull (1st Summer)
p. 129, photo 533 Ross's Gull (Adult Winter)
p. 150, photo 648 Common Tern (Juvenile)

To summarize, this seabird pocket guide achieves the very specific goals that Harrison intended: the best-ever collection of seabird photographs. While its impact likely won't be as substantial as *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, this companion pocket guide fills an important niche, and is much easier to tote around. Yes, you do need to buy this little tome, especially if you're interested in tubenosed seabirds. This pocket-sized, guide will be in my hip pocket for every future pelagic trip, no matter the location, worldwide, and I recommend it highly.——**Ron Naveen.**

Helpers at Birds' Nests: A Worldwide Survey of Cooperative Breeding and Related Behavior
Alexander F. Skutch. 1987. University of Iowa Press. 310 pp, 62 line drawings. Hardbound. $27.50.

FOR SCIENTISTS INTERESTED IN bird behavior, it has been obvious since the mid-1970s that one of the truly "hot" topics in ornithological research concerns a phenomenon known as cooperative breeding, in which sexually mature individuals, rather than breeding themselves, instead assume supportive roles in the reproductive activities of another pair. For all good, Darwinian natural selectionists, such behavior quickly raises eyebrows. Why should birds that are capable of breeding elect not to breed, but rather to help other individuals produce offspring? Is this behavior really as altruistic as it might appear at first? What are the ecological factors associated with the evolution of such cooperative breeding systems?

One of the first ornithologists to be fascinated by cooperative breeding in birds was Alexander Skutch, author of *Helpers at Birds' Nests: A Worldwide Survey of Cooperative Breeding and Related Behavior.* Widely recognized as one of the true pioneers in neotropical ornithology (*Life Histories of Central American Birds, Parent Birds and their Young, Birds of Tropical America*, and so on), Skutch, in fact, first coined the term "helpers at the nest," a phrase still commonly used to describe cooperative breeding in birds. For over half a century, Alexander Skutch has been involved in studies of cooperatively breeding birds; only in the last 20 years has the rest of the ornithological community caught up with him in recognizing the significance and interest of this topic.

Helpers at Birds' Nests attempts to provide a layman's overview of cooperative breeding and related "helpful" behaviors in birds. Despite the plethora of publications that have appeared in technical journals during recent years, little has been presented on this subject in formats readily accessible to the public-at-large. *Helpers at Birds' Nests* represents Dr. Skutch's effort to fill this void.

The outline of the book is straightforward. Family by family (largely following the "new" taxonomy, with the exception of failing to yield to the "huge, unwieldy emberizine assemblage"), Skutch summarizes known examples of what he terms "helpful birds." By using an exceptionally broad definition of cooperation, these examples include not only species characterized by true cooperative breeding systems, but also communal nesters, interspecific helpers, juvenile helpers, instances of adoption, allopreening, formation of creches, and polygyny. Even Black-footed Albatross chicks, which kick sand in order to prevent their nest scrape (and themselves) from being buried by blowing

sand, are mentioned as a type of "helper" in that such behavior "lightens the burden of parental care." In many cases the examples cited by Skutch are derived from long-term studies, but in some instances the information borders on the anectdotal or speculative. Finally, in the last three chapters, the author attempts to synthesize these wide-ranging observations by discussing "The Significance of Interspecific Helping," "Characteristics of Cooperative Breeders," and "Benefits and Evolution of Cooperative Breeding."

I found *Helpers at Birds' Nests* a difficult book to read and critique. Skutch obviously knows much about the subject, and has evidently made some effort to amass an extensive listing of relevant technical publications that are explained in terms understandable by the layman. Yet I can not recommend the book to students of bird behavior. In fact, I wonder whether the book would have been published at all had its author's reputation not preceded the manuscript.

The primary reasons for my criticism are two fold. First, it is very difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff; Skutch's broad definition of "helpfulness" results in such a heterogeneous sampling of diverse bird behaviors that it is hard not to lose sight of the forest amidst all the trees. Single chapters describing the occurrences of interspecific helping and helping by juveniles would have sufficiently proven the simple and obvious point that the drive to put food into the gaping mouth of a baby bird is, indeed, extremely strong. By concentrating this somewhat peripheral information into one or two chapters, the remaining text, which could still be organized on a family-by-family basis, would have been far more unified and focused.

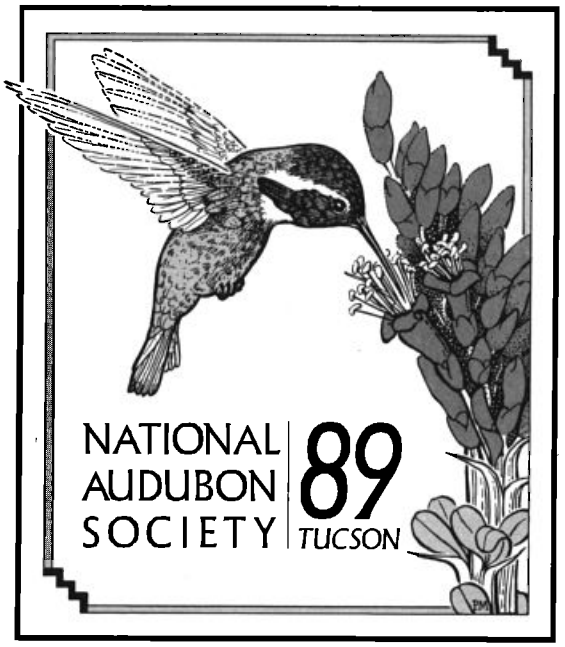
My second complaint is that *Helpers at Birds' Nests* contains an awkward thread of anthropomorphism throughout the text. While it is admittedly difficult not to fall into this trap when discussing behaviors that seem to have obvious parallels in human society, nonetheless this tendency so pervades the book that the net result may be more confusing than (forgive the pun) helpful. For instance, Skutch writes in the Preface, "Whether they occur in our tense human world or in nature's wider realm, aggression, strife, and violence seem to fascinate people and have become the subject of many books. . . . Some biologists seem to delight in detecting repressed hostility in acts that appear friendly, and they use all their ingenuity to disclose selfish deceit or cheating in ostensibly altruistic behavior. They appear to take perverse satisfaction in exposing the nastiness and harshness of the living world. Harsh it undeniably is, but not so unmitigatedly as it is often painted. Nature has a gentler side that is too frequently overlooked. . . . To make helpful birds more generally known, as a possible antidote to all the publicity that nature's uglier side receives, is one aim of this book." Later, in conclusion, Skutch surmises "that many birds breed cooperatively because they value the feeling of security that comrades give, enjoy companionship, and find this a satisfying way of life." Readers of *Helpers at Birds' Nests* who lack a good grounding in current evolutionary biology are likely to be confused by such statements, especially because they come from such a

Illustration/J. David Renwald

widely-known ornithologist. Skutch rightly, I believe, criticizes many modern biologists for viewing birds as "feelingless mechanisms for the multiplication of their genes [rather than] sentient creatures concerned for their own safety and comfort." Yet it seems possible to recognize the limitations of our scientific inquiries (Do birds think? What is the relative importance of conscious decisions vs genetic programming in determining observed patterns of behavior?) without swinging the pendulum to the opposite extreme of anthropomorphism as seems to have occurred in *Helpers at Birds' Nests*.

Despite these major flaws, *Helpers at Birds' Nests* does have a few redeeming qualities. It does introduce to the general birding public many intriguing examples of avian breeding behavior. It does mention the main controversies regarding the evolutionary basis of cooperative breeding and related behavior. Skutch's love for the natural world and joy in the intricacies of animal behavior, traits often forgotten by biologists in the heat of theoretical debates about difficult evolutionary problems, comes through loud and clear. And, for those wishing to delve into the original literature regarding particular species, the book provides a source of both obvious and obscure references (although a quick check of the Bibliography revealed only one publication more recent than 1984, as well as the absence of major theoretical treatments of the subject such as S. Emlen's papers on "The Evolution of Helping," published in *The American Naturalist* in 1982, or W. D. Koenig and F. A. Pitelka's 1981 paper "Ecological Factors and Kin Selection in the Evolution of Cooperative Breeding in Birds," published in *Natural Selection and Social Behavior: Recent Research and New Theory*).

A final word concerning the illustrations found in *Helpers at Birds' Nests*. Dana Gardner's black-and-white drawings are generally outstanding, yet it was curious to me that in a book on cooperative breeding there was only a single illustration (Superb Blue Wrens) of multiple birds engaged in activities at a nest. Even so, for readers who might be unfamiliar with many of the families discussed in the text, the supportive visual material is definitely a plus.——**Jon Atwood.**



NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY 1989 CONVENTION

"Our Southwest . . .
Challenged by Growth"

SEPTEMBER 12-16, 1989
TUCSON, ARIZONA

- Explore a variety of the Southwest's premier birding spots with local expert leaders. Look for the elusive Spotted Owl, Elegant Trogon, or Montezuma Quail.
- Visit the recently established Buenas Aires National Wildlife Refuge in search of the Masked Bobwhite Quail.
- Hear prominent national and local speakers discuss issues facing the Southwest.
- Participate in workshops that will focus on answers for the 1990's.
- Join one of the Southwest's leading wildlife photographers, C. Allan Morgan, for a walk through the grounds of the Arizona-Sonora Museum.
- Travel with the Pre/Post Convention Tours within Arizona, or to the California Coast and into Mexico.
- Enjoy the social events and special Art Show, and opening night Environmental Awareness Festival!

Write *today* for a brochure with all the details!

Audubon Convention • 4150 Darley Ave., #5 • Boulder, CO 80303

A World of Watchers
By Joseph Kastner. 1986. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco. $10.95 paperback.

and

The Bird Illustrated 1550-1900: From the Collections of the New York Public Library
Text by Joseph Kastner, commentaries by Miriam Gross, introduction by Roger Tory Peterson. With 100 illustrations, 45 in color. 1988. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York. $29.95.

BIRDING, OF COURSE, IS BEST ENjoyed in the present tense; but birding's past has its own allure. In the skillful words of Joseph Kastner, it becomes lively, colorful reading. Kastner, a lifelong birder, is well qualified to tell the tale, and to *A World of Watchers* he brings a grasp of the entire scope of the history of birding along with an unabashed love of his subject. The book, subtitled "An Informal History of the American Passion for Birds," is just that: an amiable, engaging account peopled with the geniuses, demagogues, and eccentrics who blazed the trail for what is now the nation's most popular outdoor activity. Yet the reader never loses sight of the broader importance of each unique contribution to ornithology or natural history. Because Kastner is himself an active birder, he leaves a clear trail from past to present: how, for instance, the earliest attempts at bird identification guides lead inevitably to today's sophisticated field handbooks, or what lively topics of discussion at early ornithological meetings are still hotly debated among "modern" birders.

And there is just good, old-fashioned storytelling. A chapter titled "The Great Sparrow War" recounts the coming of the House (English) Sparrow to America and its attendant grief. "The Great Connector" follows the exploits of John Burroughs, who traveled in the company of poets and took Henry Ford out birding. Kastner has a flair for historical writing, and no detail is too small to be worth retelling. However, he always comes back to the central mystique of birding, *i.e.*, the moment of "surprised enchantment" that turns the ordinary mortal into lifelong birder. There may be no single key to the mystery, but *A World of Watchers* conveys the feeling as well as if not better than any other book about birding. Ten color and 18 black-and-white illustrations by the incomparable Louis Agassiz Fuertes neatly round off the work.

In early 1988, the New York Public Library held an exhibit called "Splendid Plumage: Bird Illustrations, 1550-1900." *The Bird Illustrated* is the resulting volume. Buy this book for the reproductions alone—they are (typical of Abrams book) of superb quality. Kastner's text gives an adequate, if cursory, overview of bird art, aided by Gross's commentaries. The decision to lump the artworks by bird groups is rather puzzling (Kastner's essays don't adhere closely to the formula, anyway); I would have preferred fewer natural history notes in the interpretive captions, and more about the artists and their methods. But what a visual feast! A splendid gyrfalcon by a German, Josef Wolf, especially stands out. It may come as a surprise that, until Audubon, the Europeans far outstripped Americans for both anatomical accuracy and sheer technical brilliance, but viewed in the overall context of the development of painting, it becomes comprehensible. What Yankee stalwarts such as Catesby and Wilson accomplished was to take bird art, and birding, into the field, and imbue it with a distinctly American frontier spirit.——**Fredrick Baumgarten.**