

Books

A Field Guide to Personal Computers for Bird Watchers and Other Naturalists - A Helpful Handbook for Using Your Computer in Birding and Nature Study! Edward M. Mair. 1985. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 207 pp. \$9.95.

A Field Guide to Personal Computers is indeed written to give the naturalist "field marks" to use in considering purchase of a home computer. With analogies to bird anatomy and behavior, Mair defines and describes the physical characteristics and abilities of computers and what these mean for the computing naturalist. In a second section he discusses the capabilities and uses of packaged programs, an advantage to banders more interested in data handling than in learning to program.

The only banding application mentioned is a custom-written program. However, the discussion of the use of spreadsheet and data base management programs and their utility for bird watchers is much more pertinent to the needs of banders than are the business applications usually outlined in the documentation for those types of programs.

The general presentation in the first part of the book is a useful introduction to computers, although the description of specific models will be out of date soon. Mair avoids a common pitfall — that of recommending a specific computer. Instead, he describes the available options in power and versatility and insists that the user first decide what he wants a computer to do for him and then investigate the available software programs to find those that meet his needs. After deciding what programs are right for him, the user should choose a computer that

utilizes them. This is good advice, though in practice the first-time computer purchaser may tie the steps together more closely than Mair suggests simply because the plunge into personal computing is a total learning process and the first-timer cannot avoid assessing hardware and software together.

Changes in programs occur more slowly than changes in the technology of computers. The chapters on data base management programs will give banders a sense of what these programs can do in handling data. These chapters are especially helpful because the instruction that comes with data base management programs is often hard to follow, whereas word-processing applications are relatively straight forward. After using our computer primarily as a word processor for 3 years (Word Processing is wonderful), we were inspired by Mair's book to attack the documentation for our data management program again and use it for applications we had not tried previously.

In any book where specific computer programs are recommended the recommendations are often based on experience only with those programs. One person cannot be familiar with all programs. Others may be as good or better, so, as Mair says, investigate as many possibilities as practical before choosing your data handling package.

Finally, although we do not agree with all the author's specific recommendations on programs, his book is the most relevant available to banders interested in using a personal computer for banding data. We recommend it wholeheartedly.

Robert and Joan Tweit

North American Bluebird Society Research Grants

The North American Bluebird Society announces the fourth annual grants in aid for ornithological research directed toward cavity-nesting species of North American with emphasis on the genus *Sialia*. Presently three annual grants of single or multiple awards totaling \$5,000 are awarded:

Bluebird Research Grant — Available to student, professional or individual researchers for a suitable research project focused on any of the three species of bluebird from the genus *Sialia*.

General Research Grant — Available to student, professional and individual researchers for a suitable research project focused on a North American

cavity-nesting species. Barry A. Bermudez; topic-*Development of a House Sparrow/Starling Proof Nest Box Design that is Acceptable to Native Cavity Nesters.*

Student Research Grant — Available to full-time college or university students for a suitable research project focused on a North American cavity-nesting species.

Further guidelines and application materials are available upon request from Theodore W. Gutzke, Research Committee Chairman, P.O. Box 121, Kenmare, North Dakota 58746. Completed applications must be received by December 1, 1986; decisions will be announced by January 15, 1987.