
Books

Editor's Note: The duplication of a line in Geoffrey L. Holroyd's review of D'Veck Field Logs (*NABB* 20:167, 1995) may lead to some confusion. The second last sentence of his second paragraph should have read: However, this form lacks the space for some of the basic details of any observation, such as time and observer. —M.K.M.

Last of the Curlews. Fred Bodsworth. 1955. Dodd, Mead & Company, Toronto; reprinted 1995 with addenda by Counterpoint, Washington, hard cover. 1995 reprint: xiii + 174 pp. \$15.00 U.S.

Grade 5 in my elementary school education featured my introduction to library class (and thereby libraries). Anxious to learn more about birds, I headed first for the bird section of that library and found two books, one of which was the recently published "Last of the Curlews" by Toronto naturalist Fred Bodsworth. Although a novel, this book was different from any animal stories that I had read previously in that none of the birds mentioned spoke like people, giving me the feeling that I was reading a factual account of a year in the life of a male Eskimo Curlew. Over the intervening years since my first enthusiastic reading of the book, I have seen it in its several reprinted English forms and learned of its worldwide reputation through translation into several other languages. I was surprised to learn recently that this literary and ornithological classic is not well-known in the U.S.A., an anomaly that this 1995 reprinting should help address.

The 1995 edition of the book includes a foreword (pp. vii-xiii) by W. S. Merwin on his delight at reading an earlier edition, the original novel (pp. 1-123), a 1995 epilogue by Bodsworth (pp. 124-127) and an afterword by physicist Murray Gell-Mann (pp. 129-174). The original novel was based on the presumed last year of the presumed last Eskimo Curlew, a species that had not been observed for several years at the time the book was written. A single bird that had been sighted in Texas for several years in a row was the stimulus for the main character in the book, while a single sighting during that period suggested his meeting of a female during spring migration and travelling with

her until she was shot. The novel starts and ends with the male's arrival on Arctic breeding grounds. His summer courtship attempts, a southward migration to Argentine wintering grounds and the northward flight back to the Arctic fill the intervening chapters. The detailed descriptions of the behavior of the curlews and other birds and of the weather and geographic features encountered by the curlews show clearly the detailed research undertaken by the author. The extent of this research is further exemplified by quotations from older literature, including J. R. Forster's 1772 description of the species, descriptions of hunts at various locations and expressions of concern over early indications of their decline. The 1995 reprinting retains the original text except that Bodsworth has added a footnote to explain that the frequently mentioned Hudsonian Curlew is now known as Whimbrel.

Bodsworth's brief epilogue refers to the unexpected (in 1955) continuation of sightings since the book was written, draws attention to the 1986 monograph by Gollop, Barry and Iverson on this species (see review in *NABB* 11:140, 1986), and points out the possibilities of confusing Eskimo Curlews with the Little Curlew of Asia.

Gell-Mann's essay on bird extinction and endangerment generally and its 1½ page list of "recommended reading" outlines the history and rate of extinction, with his thoughts on reasons for pessimism and optimism in reducing the accelerating influence of human activities on the extinction rate. Little in it will be new to readers of *NABB*, but it serves as a useful introduction to the topic for readers recently awakened to environmental concerns and a useful overview summary for those of us already familiar with the details and examples mentioned.

Although banding is not mentioned specifically in this book, banders will find plenty of interest in Bodsworth's descriptions of displays and migratory behavior. Banders trying to enlighten a relative or colleague to the importance of preventing endangerment might find this novel a useful way to introduce the subject without resorting to either

a serious diatribe or an overly superficial, anthropomorphic animal story. Its factual base and Bodsworth's gifted ability with words makes it enjoyable to read.

Martin K. McNicholl

Stokes Field Guide to Birds - Western Region.
D. Stokes and L. Stokes. 1996. Little Brown,
Boston. 519 pp. \$16.95 U.S.

The visual attraction of its photographs is the most striking feature of this guide. This is the first photographic guide really to do justice to birds. Advances in the art of bird photography in the last 30 years can be seen by comparing the guide with Elliot Porter's photos in "The Birds of Arizona" (Phillips *et al.* 1964). Many of Porter's pictures are of birds at nests at angles poor for identification. Porter was considered an outstanding nature photographer, yet today's photos have far more visual impact. Now photo editors do not have to accept the only photo available for a species, but have a wealth of material from which to choose, provided by a small army of bird photographers.

Most adult plumages are illustrated in the Stokes guide—males and females and breeding and non-breeding for species with multiple plumages. Visually distinct subspecies and forms do not always receive equal treatment, although four forms of Dark-eyed Junco are pictured.

All of the information about a species, including photos, text and a range map, are on the same page. About 535 species which "regularly occur" in North America west of the 100th meridian, excluding western Alaska, are described in this guide. Most species receive a page of their own, but some pairs of similar birds share a page. The text begins with identification details intended to supplement the photos, followed by sections on habitat, voice, feeding, nesting and conservation. Additional pages illustrate hawks in flight and provide general identification tips for some other major groups.

This book will be very useful for the largest group of birders—beginning bird watchers. It will help them identify birds seen at feeders, on ponds and

on most bird club field trips, and provide brief information about the life history of the birds. The guide incorporates the changes in names through the 1995 supplement of the A.O.U. checklist, making it more current than its competitors. Many advanced birders may want it for its attractive photos and as a quick guide to life history information and current names. This guide is a far better gift for a new birder than any "50 (or 100) common birds of..."

Is it perfect? No. The introduction states that it follows the A.O.U. checklist order, but some groups are out of place, including vultures, swallows, shrikes and vireos. Not following A.O.U. order is confusing for birders using more than one guide. The authors also state that all regularly occurring birds are included, but Buff-collared Nighthawk, White-eared Hummingbird and Five-striped Sparrow, all breeding in southern Arizona, are omitted.

How else could this guide be improved? The text needs to be more specific in highlighting critical identification details to distinguish a species from other birds similar in appearance. For example, the text for Curve-billed and Bendire's thrashers (placed on the same page) does not include the critical points found in Kenn Kaufman's (1990) definitive treatment of these two species. The text does not mention that Curve-billed Thrashers can be distinguished from other thrashers by the Curve-billed's frequently heard whistled call. The range map for Curve-billed Thrasher ignores its presence in the Texas panhandle, Oklahoma and the corners of Colorado and Kansas.

The authors appear not to have consulted the "Birds of North America" (BNA) accounts published to date. For example, the Abert's Towhee text does not include the incubation period or number of broods per year, information available in the BNA account (Tweit and Finch 1994). The authors also indicate "on ground" as the preferred nest site for Abert's Towhee, but this reviewer did not find any reference to this in an exhaustive search of the literature. The vocal description of Abert's Towhee does not mention its most distinctive and commonly heard vocalization, the "squeal duet."

Under Conservation, the authors include arrows pointing up or down to represent trends in Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) or Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data. This is an excellent idea, but the authors do not seem to distinguish between statistically significant trends and non-significant ones. For example, under Brown Thrasher the authors place a double down arrow for the western range, but BBS data indicate that the trend for 1969-1994 for this area lacks statistical significance and may therefore be meaningless. The other two trends for Brown Thrasher are significant statistically. In other cases, such as Greater Pewee, where the number of routes on which the species was detected is small (five) and the number of birds detected per route is less than 0.5. I am uncomfortable accepting a trend like this as real even though the BBS reports it to be significant statistically. There are too many variables involved in the collection of BBS data for me to accept conclusions drawn from small data sets. The National Biological Survey is presenting CBC data with a cautionary statement about use of the data. Trend data from the BBS can be very valuable, but authors need to be aware of its limitations.

The concept of this book is excellent, providing a capsule summary about a species on one page, but the information needs to be accurate, since it will be read widely. The problems found in the species that I examined carefully suggest that there may be errors and omissions throughout the book. I encourage the authors to research each species more carefully to produce a more accurate second edition.

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Robert C. Tweit

Neotropical Migratory Birds: Natural History, Distribution, and Population Change. R. M. DeGraaf and J. H. Rappole. 1995. Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, New York. paperback \$27.50 U.S.

"Neotropical migrant" or "neotrop" are currently popular terms among people concerned with the fate of birds. But, what is a Neotropical migrant? In this book, DeGraaf and Rappole define "Neotrop" as a bird that moves from a breeding range extending north of the Tropic of Cancer in central Mexico to a winter range at least partly south of this line. The Black-throated Green Warbler is a classic example; it breeds in the northern United States and Canada, and spends the rest of the year in the Greater Antilles, eastern and southern Mexico, Central America, and northern South America.

Using their definition, the authors create a list of 361 "Neotropical" migrant species, but acknowledge that the number is arbitrary because information about the migratory status of many species is incomplete. Indeed, range maps in Howell and Webb (1995) suggest that Tropical Parula and Streak-backed Oriole might be added to the list.

What purpose does defining this group of birds serve? The whole recent concept of "Neotropical migrants" arose at a time when bird conservationists assumed that population declines of birds were usually caused by clearing tropical forests. With more knowledge we now realize that birds must be examined on a species by species basis. Clearing rain forest may reduce habitat for some migrant species while creating habitat for others. The species affected most are those living in tropical forests all year. Populations of some migrant species are affected more by changes on their breeding grounds.

The original version of this recent definition of "Neotropical migrant" was devised primarily for insectivorous species like vireos and warblers. Very long distance migrants, like the Arctic Tern which winters south of the Neotropics, were excluded. The authors expanded the recent definition to include all migratory species with wintering populations in the Neotropics. This definition also includes some species like Bewick's Wren and

Black-throated Sparrow whose populations in the southern part of their range are permanent residents. [Editor's note: this recent useage of the term "Neotropical migrants" for species that winter in the Neotropics differs substantially from the traditional practice of referring to migrants by where they breed. In the traditional useage, "Neotropical migrants" refers to all species that breed in the Neotropics and then migrate either within the Neotropics or to other regions, such as north to the Nearctic. Species that breed in the Nearctic, mostly Canada and the U.S.A., and migrate to other places within the Nearctic, to the Palearctic, to the Neotropics or elsewhere are all referred to as Nearctic migrants. Similarly, geese or shorebirds nesting in Siberia and wintering in California would be referred to as Palearctic migrants. The newer, almost opposite definitions, are used primarily within the Americas, whereas the traditional terms are still used elsewhere. —M.K.M.]

For the intended audience of this book—"land managers, resource professionals and birdwatchers"—the important question is, "Which species are present only seasonally in a given area (breeding, wintering or migrating) and which stay all year?" It is as important to understand the movements of the Brown Thrasher, though it migrates no farther south than the continental United States, as it is to understand those of the Hermit Thrush. An arbitrary list of "Neotropical" migrants will only partially answer this question.

This book is a compilation of distribution and habitat requirements of "Neotropical" migrants and their population status. The list covers the full taxonomic range, including waterfowl, shorebirds, waders and raptors. Each account is about 1-1/3 pages, including a range map. Distribution is defined more precisely in words, followed by references for further reading.

The brief overview provided by this book needs to be supplemented by local material, such as state or regional books, if available.

What is available to supplement state and regional guides? The "Birds of North America" series (Poole and Gill 1993-), now about one-third complete, summarizes the natural history of individual species, supplemented with extensive references. A

combination of print and multimedia titles selected from the "Literature Cited and Additional Recommended Sources" section below provides a compact library of basic information on "Neotropical" migrants. Up-to-date population trend data are available from the Breeding Bird Survey home page on the Internet's World Wide Web.

The limited information in each account means that future usefulness of the book is questionable. For instance, under Northern Oriole no mention is made of two identifiable forms, recognized again in 1995 as full species with different ranges and habitats. In the White-crowned Sparrow account, the presence of both migratory and sedentary subspecies is ignored.

The lack of recent references, except publications by the authors, and inclusion of frequent references to some out-of-print books, such as the "Master Guide to Birding" (Farrand 1983), suggest that the text was completed several years ago.

Initially, this book was a good idea, but the brevity of species accounts necessary for publication and the time lapse between the concept and the published product have detracted from its usefulness.

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Robert C. Tweit and Joan C. Tweit

Downycanyon. Ann Haymond Zwinger. 1996. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. 238 pp. + 61 pp. of reference notes. Hard cover \$35.00 U.S.; soft cover \$16.95 U.S.

This series of essays is summarized well by the notation on the cover page: it is the account of "a naturalist explor[ing] the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon." Zwinger has made numerous trips down the Colorado River, often as a volunteer on various scientific expeditions. In this book she describes the natural history of the canyon, presented as a series of stories, historical accounts and impressions gleaned from her years of experience. The book is written extremely well—winning the 1995 Western States Book Award for Creative Nonfiction. Fifteen chapters are organized as a seasonal progression down the river, with each chapter introduced by a fine line drawing of canyon scenes and a quote from the region's early explorers.

Zwinger describes many aspects of the canyon, emphasizing its geology and the history of its peoples, both North American and early European explorers. There are many humorous and interesting stories told. She describes the natural

history as well, including aspects of its native avifauna. Unfortunately, not all the avian information is correct. Common bird names are often incorrect or at least out-of-date, and no scientific names are given in the text (although some appear in the index). For example, American Wigeon (*Anas americana*) is spelled "widgeon," and the American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*) is referred to just by the old colloquial "ouzel." It is also listed incorrectly in the index as *Cinclus americanus*. The juncos in the book are still Oregon (not Dark-eyed, *Junco hyemalis*), and ravens appear without their full names.

Other errors are more substantial. On page 25, Zwinger implies that Ruby-crowned Kinglets (*Regulus calendula*) have their "red caps" only in their breeding plumage, whereas the red crown patch is present in adult males year round. On page 204, the American Coot (*Fulica americana*) is described as "a small stolid black duck" (!), while on page 205 the Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) is stated to be endangered. The latter may be declining in the Grand Canyon due to loss of cattail marshes, but it is not on any state or federal endangered species list of which I am aware.

The strangest bird statement was that the Giant Condor (*Gymnogyps amplus*) was finally driven to extinction by prospectors in the Grand Canyon, who shot the last one in 1881 (p. 77). To my knowledge there are no historical records of *G. amplus* co-occurring with modern humans. The California Condor (*G. californicus*) did occur in the region in the late 1880s, however; and one report of a California Condor from Pierce's Ferry along the Colorado River in March 1881 was summarized by Phillips *et al.* (1964. The birds of Arizona. Univ. Arizona Press, Tucson).

In short, if you are interested in the geology or history of exploration of the Grand Canyon, or if you want to read a well-written description of the canyon in all its seasons, get this book. If you want information on the birds of the region, see Brown *et al.* (1987. Grand Canyon birds. Univ. Arizona Press, Tucson, reviewed in *NABB* 14:18, 1989).

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