

BOOK REVIEWS

It is in the species accounts, comprising nearly 500 pages, that the knowledge and background of the authors become evident. Each account has a brief summary and description characterizing the species, followed by sections covering similar species, voice, behavior, habitat, distribution, status and conservation, subspecies, taxonomic relationships, plumages and molts, and references listed by subject. Each of these sections is extremely thorough, and almost every account contains some interesting tidbit of information not generally known or easily pulled from the literature. Just a few examples include a detailed chronology of the Bachman's Warbler's demise, including an assessment of every record since the 1950s, a thorough summary of how the ranges of the Golden-winged and Blue-winged warblers, and the frequency of their hybrids, have ebbed and flowed in correspondence with human-induced habitat changes, the similarity of a hybrid Black-throated Green × Townsend's Warbler to a pure Townsend's, that much of the key habitat of the Golden-cheeked Warbler was destroyed by landowners in anticipation of its listing as an endangered species, that the Black-and-white Warbler continues to be placed in the awkwardly named genus *Mniotilta* rather than *Dendroica* because the rules of nomenclature dictate that the earlier name *Mniotilta* take priority if they are lumped, a detailed account of how tail-bobbing in the two waterthrushes differs, and that, through 1995, there were 31 records of the Red-faced Warbler in six states outside of Arizona and New Mexico. Additionally the range maps, put together by Sue A. Tackett and Larry O. Rosche, are excellent, in many accounts giving detail to the county level within states. I came away from the species accounts sensing that everything known about each species was there.

It is the job of the reviewer to point out discrepancies and inconsistencies, of which I struggled to find a few. While the taxonomic information is valuable, the numerous indications that certain taxa should possibly be considered closely related (or not) to other taxa seemed a bit haphazard and unreferenced. For example, in an introductory section on warbler genera it is strongly suggested that the Ovenbird be split from *Seiurus* (the waterthrushes), while on the following page it is suggested that the Fan-tailed Warbler (*Euthlypis*), a distinct creature to me, be merged with *Basileuterus*. Likewise, I might argue against the idea that "a close relationship between the waterthrushes and *Dendroica* is suggested" by a single reported hybrid. Besides being inconsistent, none of these opinions is referenced, leaving me to wonder how valid they actually are. In the American Redstart account is the statement that "much needs to be learned about the exact nature of the prealternate molt in this species." In fact, more is known about this molt in American Redstart than in any of the other warblers. A general statement about our lack of knowledge of prealternate molts in most warblers would have been of greater value. Finally, without looking hard at all, I noticed several errors in the citations and two (one would have been preferable) bibliographies: DeSante and Pyle "1987" (p. 36) should have been 1986; Hall "1983" under the Yellow-throated Warbler should have been 1993; Howell, "S. W." (p. 636) should be Howell, S. N. G., and so on. That these were located without effort makes me wonder how many other errors there are in the citations.

Nonetheless, these few grievances do not come close to outweighing the many benefits of *Warblers*, a must for all birders and ornithologists.

Peter Pyle

Warblers of Europe, Asia and North Africa, by Kevin Baker. 1997. Princeton University Press. 400 pages, 48 color plates, many black-and-white figures. Hard-back, price not given. ISBN 0-691-01169-9.

Published in North America by Princeton University Press, this book comes from the Helm stable that brought us such classics as *Seabirds* (Harrison 1983) and *Shorebirds* (Hayman et al. 1986), with which it shares a similar format (brief

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introductory chapters followed by color plates with short, facing-page texts and distribution maps, and thence by species accounts). Unfortunately, the similarities largely end there. This volume covers 145 species of a group traditionally classified as the Sylviidae, the Old World warblers. All species known to breed in the Palearctic and southern Asia are included, although, strangely, the African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus (baeticatus?) avicenniae* population of the Red Sea area was excluded. Baker makes a valiant one-man attempt to treat an enormous subject, but the task evidently was too great to generate another classic.

The quality of the color plates is inconsistent, falling short of the standard expected from modern bird-identification literature. The plates do not capture the true shape and structure of many species, and the subtle plumage tones that make Old World warblers so appealing (and perplexing) are often absent. Above all, the omission of many field-separable subspecies compromises the value of the plates for identification.

The taxonomy of palearctic warblers is presently undergoing considerable reevaluation. While acknowledging this fact, Baker proceeds to use it as an excuse for making "no rigorous attempt" (p. 12) at a modern assessment of specific, generic, or even family relationships. Remarkably, the dust jacket states that this book "brings up to date the latest thinking on taxonomic treatment (of warblers)," an assertion that is both misleading and at odds with the book's content. By circumventing the critical subject of taxonomy, the otherwise reasonable species accounts are severely undermined. In one example among many, the *Phylloscopus* warbler taxa *chloronotus* and *kansuensis* are lumped with Pallas' Leaf Warbler, *P. proregulus*, despite widely accepted published data strongly indicating that both are valid species (cf. Ibis 134:329–334; Bull. Br. Ornithol. Club 117:177–193).

The distribution information appears to be largely accurate, but a cursory check revealed several mapping errors (e.g., Marmora's Warbler is mapped for Menorca despite a [correct] contrary statement in the text). It was disappointing to find that the distribution sections of the species accounts gave no information on vagrant occurrences. In addition, about 25 distribution maps in the review copy were printed too faintly to be legible.

This book serves as a general introduction to palearctic and Asian warblers but falls well short of being a comprehensive identification guide. North American birders seeking state-of-the-art information on species such as the Arctic, Dusky, and Lanceolated warblers should probably look elsewhere.

Jon R. King

Wing Your Way to

Western Field Ornithologists'

23RD ANNUAL MEETING

**ARCATA, HUMBOLDT
COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**



1-4 October 1998

at the Quality Inn on Guintoli Lane at Highways 101 and 299 (800-221-2222 or 707-822-0409). The hotel is offering a special rate of \$44 per room for those reserving before 20 September. Please mention that you are with the Western Field Ornithologists meeting when you make your reservation. Other accommodations/camping available.

Tentative Schedule of Events

Thursday evening, 1 October: Welcome; registration; WFO board meeting; presentation "Birding behind the Redwood Curtain: The Story of North Coast Rarities," by Ron LeValley.

Friday morning, 2 October: Field trips (6:00-11:00 AM). Target species include the Black-capped Chickadee, Gray Jay, Red Crossbill, shorebirds, migrant passerines, and possibilities such as the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and vagrants.

Friday afternoon: Scientific presentations (1:00-5:30 PM)

Friday evening: California Bird Records Committee presentation by Guy McCaskie; Identification panel chaired by Kimball Garrett

Saturday morning, 3 October: Field trips (6:00-11:00 AM)

Saturday afternoon: Scientific presentations, posters, and art show (1:00-6:30 PM)

Saturday evening: Annual banquet; "Parallels in Latitude: Comparing the Avifaunas of Western North America and Western South America," by Steve Howell and Sophie Webb

Sunday, 4 October: Del Norte County field trip (6:00 AM-4:00 PM)

Field trip destinations: Mad River County Park and Patrick's Point (seabirds, migrant passerines); Fairhaven (north spit Humboldt Bay and Arcata Bottoms (vagrants, loons, migrant grassland species); Ferndale and Eel River Wildlife Area (vagrants, migrants, shorebirds, Gray Jay); Crescent City and Smith River mouth, Del Norte County (Sunday only—seabirds, shorebirds, migrants, Black-capped Chickadee). Transportation in vans available Friday and Saturday.

Registration brochure coming soon. For more information, contact WFO Conference, c/o Mad River Biologists, P. O. Box 3020, McKinleyville, CA 95519