

BOOK REVIEWS

The Birds of Sonora, by Stephen M. Russell and Gale Monson. 1998. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. 360 pages, 4 overview maps plus range maps for all species, 34 black-and-white illustrations by Ray Harm. Hardback, \$75.00. ISBN 0-8165-1635-9.

The Birds of Sonora (hereafter *Sonora*) is an impressive work that covers the status and distribution of the avifauna of the Mexican state of Sonora, immediately south of Arizona. It provides an overview of the transition between temperate and tropical habitats on the Pacific slope of the Americas and will be of interest and value to all interested in North American bird distribution. Since 1964, the authors between them have spent 692 days in the field in Sonora, during 150 different trips that sampled almost all parts of the state. They summarized previous published work and made an effort to gather and assess unpublished museum data and field observations from numerous sources. Consequently, this work is a worthy successor to A. J. van Rossem's 1945 classic, *Birds of Sonora* (Occas. Papers Mus. Zool. Louisiana State Univ. 21), long out of print.

A short introduction provides an overview of the state's geography and habitats, brief discussions of migration, human effects on the environment (sadly, all too rampant), recent changes in bird distribution, and an explanation of the species accounts. Accounts for 525 bird species recorded from mainland Sonora constitute the meat of the book. One appendix lists plants mentioned, another is a comprehensive gazetteer. Islands in the Gulf of California are not included, and I did not find a cut-off date for inclusion of species or records (mid 1990s?). Sequence and taxonomy follow the AOU (through 1995, with notes in relation to the 1997 AOU supplement), and Spanish names are given for all species (following the new standard reference, Escalante et al. 1996). Decorative black-and-white illustrations of selected species are scattered through the text.

The "plan of the species accounts" section discusses problems with sight records, how relative abundances are defined, and what the maps show. Species of hypothetical occurrence are included in the body of the main text, within brackets, if their occurrence is "not supported by a specimen, a clearly diagnostic photograph, or extensive detailed information from multiple observers." These criteria appear to have been applied with borderline consistency; e.g., compare two sight records (two observers in all) of Sabine's Gull (hypothetical), with two records (three observers) of the Palm Warbler (accepted), or one record (three observers) of the Chestnut-sided (hypothetical). The authors note, however, that readers may wish to apply different criteria for judging records, and overall I applaud the extensive use of well-documented sight records in this work. It may also be noted that the authors were no less demanding of their own sight records, e.g., Monson's single-observer Prothonotary Warbler (hypothetical).

Symbols plotted on the maps show presumed breeding, confirmed breeding, transient, transient/winter, and locality records, this last when data are insufficient to determine a species' status at a given locality. Thus, at a glance, one can see the distribution and status of a given species, and reference to the text fills in details about seasonal occurrence, habitat, nesting behavior (e.g., the first published description of a nest of the Gray-collared Becard), and many other useful tidbits gleaned from the authors' and other observers' field experience. The easy writing style of the species accounts is a pleasant change from the impersonal, castrated text that pervades so much modern scientific writing, and the information is thus very accessible to both layperson and scientist; check the accounts for the Canyon Wren or Brown-backed Solitaire for two examples among many.

Subspecies are mentioned rarely, except for an eclectic selection of some well-marked races, e.g., the Savannah Sparrow but not the Fox, the Dark-eyed Junco but not the Solitary Vireo. Thus, readers interested in subspecies and their distributions, which provide interesting biogeographic insights, still need to consult Van Rossem

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(1945). Listing subspecies and their distributions would have increased the value of *Sonora* greatly, although I recognize that this undertaking is far easier said than done.

More synthesis of information on topics such as local and elevational migrations or breeding seasons also would have increased the usefulness of *Sonora*. Simple lists of the avifauna by bioregion and by status (resident breeder, summer resident, transient, etc.) could have served to highlight gaps in our knowledge, perhaps prompting future studies.

The book has an attractive layout that may suggest another University of Arizona Press classic, *The Birds of Arizona* by Allan Phillips, Joe Marshall, and Monson (1964). *Sonora* is large (almost 9 × 12 inches) and library oriented, with liberal use of page space. While this may be a designer's dream, the same information could have been conveyed easily in a work half the size (and half the price!), and I would prefer a more compact and affordable book that could be carried easily in the field, where it would be invaluable. Instead, the book looks so "nice" that I suspect many will be reluctant to carry it even in the car! Typographical errors seem rare but not absent; e.g., the text lists four records of the Long-eared Owl while the map plots five.

These points notwithstanding, I recommend strongly *The Birds of Sonora* as an important addition to our knowledge of the status, distribution, and natural history of Mexican birds, and I look forward to the day when similar works exist for many more Mexican states.

Steve N. G. Howell

Parrots: A Guide to Parrots of the World, by Tony Juniper and Mike Parr. 1998. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, CT. 584 pp., 88 color plates, numerous black-and-white drawings, about 350 maps. Hardback, \$55.00. ISBN 0-300-07453-0.

This volume in the "Helm" series (published in the U.K. by Pica Press) might seem of little direct relevance to North American field ornithology, but bear in mind that 63 species of parrot have been recorded free-flying in Florida (Stevenson and Anderson, 1994, *The Birdlife of Florida*), 33 in California (Garrett, 1997, *W. Birds* 28:181–195). A few species maintain large populations in California, south Florida, and southernmost Texas, and 17 species occur naturally in Mexico north of the isthmus. Although parrot identification is well treated in many regional field guides, we find ourselves in a unique situation in the United States. Free-flying parrots and established naturalized populations might be derived from any of five continents; therefore regional guides do not treat all our species or give appropriate comparisons. Juniper and Parr provide the sort of guide that U. S. parrot-watchers have needed. At 7 × 9.75 inches it is hefty but microscopic in comparison to the other comprehensive treatment of the world's parrots, *Parrots of the World* by Forshaw and Cooper. Other advantages over Forshaw's monograph (1989) include a database that is several years more up to date, a substantially lower price, and greater emphasis on field identification, with more plumage variations shown. Portability and affordability are also advantages over the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, vol. 4 (del Hoyo et al., 1997), which has a thorough and beautifully illustrated treatment of parrots.

The familiar format of this series needs little elaboration. *Parrots* has a slim introductory section, nearly half of which is devoted to conservation issues, befitting this beleaguered group and reflecting the impressive conservation credentials of the two authors. There are also four pages on systematics, five on natural history, and three describing the layout of the species accounts and parrot topography. The species accounts include sections on identification (a brief description and discussion of similar species), voice, distribution and status (conservation issues are treated in this section, underscoring the double threats parrots face from habitat degradation and trapping for the pet trade), ecology (with notes on habitat, foraging ecology, behavior,