BOOK REVIEW

Monterey Birds, by Don Roberson. Second edition. 2002. Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society, Carmel, California. viii + 536 pp., 16 color plates, 61 black-and-white photos, 182 maps, 2 tables. Paperback, $24.95. ISBN 0-9615798-2-X.

Monterey County—a large coastal county in central California—is famous for its agreeable climate, varied landscape, and a bird list of 482 species: about 78% of California's total and nearly 50% of all species recorded in the United States. It has hosted several first state records (e.g., of the Long-toed Stint) and even some first North American records (e.g., of Stejneger's Petrel). This book is a fully updated and expanded version of Roberson's out-of-print 1985 first edition of *Monterey Birds*, which summarized the status and distribution of this county's ample avifauna. All species are now treated more thoroughly, including 54 that have been recorded in the county since the first edition was published, and the result is a book twice the size of the first edition (536 pages vs. 266 pages). The format is essentially unchanged and follows that of most regional "when and where" bird books, with individual species accounts as its core. There are 35 pages of detailed bird-finding routes, followed by brief chapters on bird-distribution patterns, impacts of El Niño, migration, taxonomy, molt, and conservation. Each species account covers status, distribution, and subspecific taxonomy; a bar graph illustrates seasonal abundance, and a range map is included for species that nest in the county. The book generally follows the taxonomy and nomenclature of the AOU (1998), but for nonpasserines it follows the taxonomy in the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo et al. 1992-2002), which varies slightly from that of the AOU.

This must be one of the most detailed county bird books yet published, with a tremendous amount of information pertaining to many aspects of bird occurrence. Indeed, a feature that sets this book apart from most regional and even state bird books is its thoroughness. In preparing this book the author examined more than 10,000 museum specimen records from nine museums, 40,000 sight records, and data from the Monterey County Breeding Bird Atlas (Roberson and Tenney 1993), local and regional banding projects, Christmas Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Surveys, and Winter Bird Censuses. He cites 551 specific published and unpublished references extending from 1871 to 2002, including ones from expected journals such as *Condor* and *Western Birds* to *Journal of Molecular Evolution* and *Limnological Oceanography*. A testament to Roberson's thoroughness is the citation of John Steinbeck's 1937 novel, *Of Mice and Men*—a story set in Monterey County—to illustrate the probable presence of introduced Rock Doves early in the 20th century, when no one cared to document the occurrence of nonnative, nongame birds.

Other strong points of the book include its broad and interesting selection of photos and its helpful information on identification and subspecies. Its coverage of subspecies helps us appreciate the complexity of bird distribution and movements: e.g., Hermit Thrushes breeding in Monterey County are not the same ones that winter there. Also, the author's careful review of information insures that a minimum of erroneous information was included.

Records of especially rare birds are usually included only if they were reviewed and accepted by the California Bird Records Committee (hereafter CBRC). But the author admits in the introduction (p. 58) that he included several records that the CBRC did not accept but he considers to be "good" records nonetheless. While we understand the rationale for including such records, we are usually left wondering which records are which: e.g., Roberson includes a record of the Veery at the Carmel River mouth, 21–22 September 1998, that was not accepted by the CBRC—but there is nothing distinguishing it in the text from the one other Veery record, which was accepted. That he includes such records is justifiable, but that he does not flag them undermines the significance of CBRC decisions. This course denies the useful role of the CBRC and

does disservice to the community of observers who submit reports of rare birds.

Roberson often describes historical changes in distribution and abundance of birds, sometimes revealing major landscape changes as the cause. He notes, for example, that Black-crowned Night-Herons once bred more widely before the Salinas River was re-routed and marshes were drained, citing egg sets from the 1890s. He also notes more recent changes, some where the cause is not as evident (e.g., the Western Grebe historically was present along the coast only in the nonbreeding season, but it is now present year round). Such facts are common in this book and are not limited to those involving major population trends. For example, Roberson points out that the breeding success of Brandt's Cormorants on the Coast Guard jetty at the Monterey harbor depends on the patterns of basking California sea lions: when sea lions are present they dominate the jetty and cormorant nests are restricted to a few channel pilings.

Although the book is stuffed with good information, it is highly biased toward the northwestern corner of the county, principally the coastal region from the Pajaro River to Big Sur. While in many respects this is the most interesting part of Monterey County, and the emphasis reflects the distribution of birders, there must be a great deal to be learned about the more remote parts of the county. And, admittedly, several intriguing occurrences are cited from the county's southeast corner. But we get the impression that many more surprises will come to light in the little-visited Gabilan and Santa Lucia mountains and upper Salinas Valley.

Throughout the book, Roberson refers to "our" and "we," but it is not always clear exactly what he means. References to "our" birds nesting in the county—to be general—are fine in the parochial sense, but what do they mean to a reader in New York? Also, the use of "we" in places implies a group opinion or consensus, when instead it seems to be mostly the author's opinion being put forward.

The author regularly describes a bird's status more broadly, into neighboring counties, across the state, and beyond. While this is helpful in highlighting geographic patterns and knowledge gaps, we found instances where such information was misleading or actually erroneous. For example, the Snowy Egret account references "small nesting colonies" in Santa Cruz County, but we are unaware of any breeding records. Although Roberson frequently makes comparisons to Santa Cruz County, he makes relatively little comparison to Santa Clara, San Benito, Fresno, Kings, or San Luis Obispo counties. Does this reflect a lack of information from neighboring parts of those adjacent counties? Or does it largely reflect the heavy emphasis on patterns of occurrence in the northwestern corner of Monterey County? Nonetheless, the comparisons he does make are valuable, and the reader will undoubtedly make others. For example, only riparian nesting of Green Herons is referenced in Monterey County, yet in recent years there have been many records of nesting from urban or suburban "habitats" in Santa Cruz County. Are urban-nesting Green Herons lacking in Monterey County, or are they still to be discovered? For the Brant, Roberson comments that it is "best known from fall migration..." We find that curious, as the Brant is seldom reported in Santa Cruz County in fall but is much more prominent there in spring—Brants must migrate south through Santa Cruz County, but why are they so invisible? This is a puzzling discrepancy for a population that must be passing more or less equally through both counties.

The species accounts contain a number of instances where Santa Cruz County records were adopted as Monterey County records and even graphed (e.g., a 19 March record of the South Polar Skua). These involve mostly rarities or unseasonable occurrences that were very close to Monterey County, and in one case Roberson admits adopting it because the bird must have flown through Monterey County. We understand this, but don't think it is "cricket" in a county bird book (county bird-record keepers can be more territorial than the birds themselves).

There is a heavy emphasis on rarities in this book, and the author admits as much

and makes no apologies for it. But the short treatment given many common species seems to leave out much that might be of interest (e.g., the Crested Caracara with a single record gets two pages, while the American Kestrel with an estimated 750 nesting pairs is covered in a half page). In some cases, this might reflect an actual lack of specific information on the common species, since most observers tend only to report rare occurrences.

Roberson frequently speculates on various aspects of occurrences. We appreciate that he has done this; it makes the accounts lively and unsheathes new questions. These proposals, however, are not always convincing. On occasions the author attempts to link two or more disparate records: e.g., he hypothesizes that a single male Harlequin Duck was responsible for irregular sightings over a 12-year period, even though occasionally two males were present and neither had distinguishing field marks. If this conjecture is true, the bird would set a longevity record for the species (Klimkiewicz 2002). In another instance he claims that the first two reports of a Great-tailed Grackle in Monterey County, coming on the same day, involved the same bird even though they were 18 miles apart. Likewise, he suggests that several Tufted Ducks seen in Monterey County may have been the same individuals seen hundreds of miles south in southern California. Although these interpretations are plausible, we are unconvinced.

Roberson also argues that because turkeys were present in California during the Pleistocene, those introduced by the California Department of Fish and Game could be thought of as reintroduced native birds. This concept is appealing, but none of the Pleistocene turkeys from California has been definitively identified as the Wild Turkey (Steadman 1980), and the species best represented in the fossil record has been thought more closely related to the Ocellated Turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*) of southeastern Mexico and Central America (Stock 1992). In other instances, the author's speculations seem right on target. For example, he attributes an apparent decline in White-winged Scoters to increasing sea-surface temperatures. And this seems likely, given the apparent affects of increasing ocean temperatures on regional numbers of two other shallow-diving seabirds, the Sooty Shearwater and Cassin's Auklet (Oedekoven et al. 2001).

The useful and detailed range maps are based on the five-year breeding bird atlas (Roberson and Tenney 1993). Although the maps are first-rate, we found some oversights, e.g., the map (and text) for Wilson's Warbler misses all the nesting in the lower Salinas Valley and the northern margin of the county, a difference inexplicably at odds with the findings reported in the atlas cited above. Also, the maps for Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and all breeding thrushes were omitted. These and corrections for other map glitches, plus general errata, are on the author's website at http://montereybay.com/creagrus/errata.html.

We also found numerous typos (e.g., a 1997 paper by Unitt and Rea mentioned in the Brown Creeper account is listed as being from 1977, although the correct date is cited elsewhere in this account and in the literature cited), omissions (e.g., there is a third northern California record of the Greater Pewee, in 1984/1985 at Union City, Alameda Co.), apparent miscues (e.g., Roberson says Western Gulls breeding in Monterey County are of the northern subspecies *occidentalis*, but Grinnell and Miller [1944: 166] noted that the breeding range of the southern subspecies *wymani* extends north to Point Lobos, Monterey County, and egg sets collected in Monterey County [e.g., Museum of Vertebrate Zoology specimen 5636] are assigned to this subspecies), and hyperbole (e.g., Roberson claims that "literally millions" of phalaropes were pushed into the bay in late April 1996 and implies that most were Red Phalaropes—del Hoyo et al [1996: 532] listed the world population of Red Phalarope at 100,000 to 1,000,000 birds).

Despite the book's apparent provincialism, its appeal will extend beyond Monterey County's boundaries. Indeed, we referred to the first edition of this book commonly to

make sense of occurrence patterns not only in neighboring Santa Cruz County, but also for perspectives on bird occurrences all along the west coast, and in the West in general. While we have shown what must seem to be more negative points than positive ones, a book with so many details is predisposed to this kind of criticism. It is, however, a wonderful book, admirable for its breadth, its authoritativeness, and its readability. It sets a new standard for county-level status and distribution books, and we recommend it with unbridled enthusiasm.

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