

BOOK REVIEWS

Birds of Washington: Status and Distribution, by Terence R. Wahl, Bill Tweit, and Steven G. Mlodinow (eds.). 2005. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis. 436 pages, 35 black-and-white illustrations, numerous maps. Hardback, \$65. ISBN 0-87071-049-4.

The *Birds of Washington* (hereafter BWA) is the first work since 1953 (when *Birds of Washington State* by Jewett et al. was published) to cover the status of Washington's birds completely. The three editors contributed a large portion of the species accounts, but, all told, more than 40 authors played parts in writing the book. All 483 species recorded in Washington have individual species accounts, and separate sections in the back of the book treat introduced and hypothetical species (one of which, the Red-necked Stint, has since been confirmed in the state).

BWA opens with a brief introduction, followed by chapters describing bird habitats of Washington, the maps, conservation, sources, and a discussion of changes in status and distribution since 1950. For regularly occurring species, the accounts begin with a brief statement of status, followed by a map and bar graphs, a list of Washington subspecies, and sections on Habitat, Occurrence, Remarks, and Noteworthy Records. Rarities have shorter accounts explaining their occurrence. Illustrations by Shawneen Finnegan and G. Scott Mills are pleasing to the eye and break up the columns of text, bar graphs, and maps.

The goals of the book as stated on page vi are to "describe the status and abundance, trends, and changes of species and populations occurring in Washington as of the year 2000, and to update and correct previous descriptions." To meet the last of these objectives, BWA often refers to Jewett et al. (1953), highlighting discoveries made since 1953 as well as changes in trends for individual species. Overall the book does an excellent job of meeting its goals. Most of the accounts are clear, easy to read, and interesting. The bulk of each account is made up of the Occurrence section, while the Remarks often add random pieces of interesting information. Unlike *Birds of Oregon* (Marshall et al. 2003), which bills itself as a general reference, BWA contains very little information about general bird biology, identification, and distribution outside the state. Given that this information is widely available in other sources, the editors felt it more fitting to limit the scope of BWA to topics related directly to Washington. Therefore, the user does not have to wade through long accounts to find relevant information on the status and distribution of Washington's birds. We found the BWA style saves time and frustration when using the book to answer specific questions. Some readers will find the cut-and-dry writing style rather dull, but factually BWA is a marked improvement over Washington's two prior state books, Dawson and Bowles (1909) and Jewett et al. (1953). Though both earlier books are more pleasing and interesting to read, the information in BWA is far superior.

The Noteworthy Records section is often broken down into subsections for western and eastern Washington and includes seasonal high counts, early and late dates, and records of regional interest. This section often appears to be a jumbled listing of numbers, but because it is broken down into subsections there is generally enough information for the significance of a record to be deciphered. This is a great improvement over Jewett et al. (1953), who often listed dates and locations without numbers, or without any comments as to the relevance or significance of a sighting.

The treatment of subspecies is excellent, thoroughly researched, and well explained. Careful reading of this section highlights just how strongly the Cascade Range acts as a barrier for birds, with many species having different subspecies breeding or wintering on opposite sides of these mountains. Unfortunately, with such a complex subject there are always errors, and the information for subspecies of the California Gull is missing. This is disappointing, as a good treatment of the two subspecies' distributions is needed before our knowledge can be refined. Also, the subspecies for Washington's single record of Gray-cheeked Thrush is stated as "presumably *minimus*" when it is more likely to be the widespread *aliciae*. A rather humorous

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error is a misspelling of the Western Red-tailed Hawk's western subspecies, which appears to have been spelled phonetically as "calourous" instead of *calurus*. Generally, however, the handful of errors does not detract from a superb handling of an immense and difficult subject.

If you have an interest in Washington rarities this is the volume to consult. For example, when checking the status of an eastern warbler in Washington, one will find a complete list of accepted and rejected records and often a statement of how the records correlate with those from Oregon, California, and British Columbia. While BWA treats species at least through the year 2000, many accounts include more recent data, and very recent additions to the state list are also included. For example, the Redwing found on 21 December 2004 made it into the text, not bad for a book released in April 2005.

The seasonal distribution maps incorporate the latest mapping technology. They were created with GIS software by choosing appropriate habitats from satellite land-cover maps within the species' breeding and wintering ranges. Breeding distributions were based on ranges determined in the 1997 Gap Analysis Project, which used data from the 1987–1996 Washington Breeding Bird Atlas (Smith et al. 1997). Winter ranges were determined largely from Christmas Bird Counts and supplemented by other sources. The end result is range maps that look very detailed and precise but are not necessarily entirely accurate. Maps were modified on the basis of literature and reviewers' opinions; however, more extensive review could have revealed more areas where species occur in low numbers or very locally. For example, there are nesting records of the Least Flycatcher from the Puget Sound lowlands, but the map does not indicate breeding by this species west of the Cascades. The maps do not offer any information on abundance and can be misleading (as stated in the introduction) because a bird can be rare over a large area and very common in a small area, but the reader has no information from which to make these distinctions. At least one color map of the state's habitats would have been a worthwhile addition. Overall the strongest feature of the maps is how they draw a clear correlation between habitat, geography, and bird distribution. One can easily locate high-quality sagebrush habitat in the state—just look at the map for Sage Thrasher. Want to know where rivers and streams occur on the east side of the state? Check the Yellow-headed Blackbird account. With a little more improvement this technology is likely to become the standard for all range maps.

As with any books of this nature, which compile large amounts of information from numerous authors, there are mistakes and inconsistencies. For example, the introductory statement of status frequently does not agree with the bar graphs, and sometimes the Noteworthy Records do not match the bar graphs. In the case of Sooty and Short-tailed shearwaters, the text indicates that the latter species is more common in winter, but the bar graph suggests the former is commoner year round. Common knowledge suggests the text is correct, but the Noteworthy Records section indicates that the bar graph is correct. Unfortunately, no mention is made of the difficulty in distinguishing these two species, and how that might affect the data. And, the absence of a key to the bar graphs (the most glaring problem in the book, and a very unfortunate omission) means there is no way to know exactly what sort of numbers the bars and dots indicate!

As another example, the 2004 split of the Canada Goose into two species, and the half-hearted attempt to update the book to reflect this, wreaked havoc in BWA. The text for this species pair begins with the names of both species at the top of a single account, which seems to be the extent of effort put forth to acknowledge the split. All subspecies are listed together, but with no designation as to which belong to which species. The Cackling Goose, *B. h. minima*, is linked to the scientific name *hutchinsii* (which is misspelled as *hutchinsonii*), with *minima* in parentheses, while the remainder of the account refers to *hutchinsii* when it should refer to *minima*.

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Richardson's Goose, *B. h. hutchinsii*, is at best a rare vagrant to Washington, whereas the Cackling Goose, *B. h. minima*, is a regular winter resident. The text does a fairly good job of describing in which regions of the state the various subspecies of both species occur, even listing a few very local populations of *B. canadensis fulva*. But it does not give meaningful information about the abundance of a given subspecies within a region. For example, it would have been useful to explain that *B. h. taverneri* is generally more much more numerous than *B. c. parvipes* on the west side of the Cascades, whereas the opposite is true on the east side.

The accounts vary greatly in length and sometimes in content, partly because of there being over 40 authors, but the editors did an excellent job of making the accounts similar in style. There are still quite a few instances of poorly worded sentences, which can be annoying, but usually these do not affect the information being conveyed. Some of the terminology used to define rarities is a bit puzzling, however, as in the distinction between "visitor" and "vagrant" being somewhat arbitrary, and the use of "casual" is not intuitive. But most mistakes are fairly benign, and BWA succeeds in presenting information in a manner that is user-friendly and interesting to read. This work comes as a greatly needed reference to the status and distribution of Washington's avifauna, and it serves as a solid new baseline for all interested in this fascinating area.

LITERATURE CITED

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