

BOOK REVIEWS

Bird Songs of the Pacific Northwest, by Geoffrey A. Keller and Gerrit Vyn. 2008. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. 5-CD set, including a 57-page booklet, \$39.95.

This set of five compact disks contains 931 separate recordings covering 316 species from the Pacific Northwest. This area is not defined, but to judge from a map on the back cover of the booklet it includes southwestern British Columbia, all of Washington and Oregon, the canyonlands of southwestern Idaho, and about a 100-mile swath of northern California. Each species receives its own track. Each track begins with the species' name, and individual cuts within each track are separated by a brief pause.

The booklet includes a short paragraph titled "Using This Audio Guide" that explains the information included in the descriptions of the tracks. After the acknowledgments and before the descriptions is a list of contributing recordists. A total of 69 recordists contributed recordings, including some of historical interest, such as that of the Black Oystercatcher by Arthur A. Allen. The primary author provided the lion's share of the recordings (38%), while the secondary author, serving primarily as producer and studio engineer, provided a little more than 5%.

Other major recordists are David H. Herr (8.1%), Thomas G. Sander (6.6%), and Randolph S. Little (6%). In the descriptions of the tracks, each track's number is followed by the species' name, followed by a list of recordings of that species with a brief description of each vocalization type, often with notes comparing it to sounds of similar species as well as an attempt at transcribing the sounds into print with the English alphabet. Also included are location by state or province (or country in a few examples), month, Macauley Library (ML) catalog number, and initials of the recordist. I found it very easy to follow the descriptions while listening to the recordings. The booklet concludes with an index to the species' English names.

Quality of Recordings. As we have come to expect from Keller's collaborations with the Macauley Library, the quality of the recordings is outstanding overall. The beginnings and endings of the cuts are cleanly and artfully edited without any irritating fading away in the middle of song phrases. Some cuts do have recognizable background noises, but they are always minimal and do not detract from the species portrayed. If any were edited to reduce background noise none have the typically tinny or tunnel effect that usually results from such treatment. All are a pleasure to listen to.

Species Selection. This "audio guide" is said to be focused on species "that breed within this region but also includes calls of many migrants and winter visitors one is likely to encounter." There are, in fact, so many nonbreeding species included I wonder why any were left out at all. Some rather uncommon ones, such as the Black Scoter, were included while more common ones, such as the Greater Scaup and White-winged and Surf Scoters, were not. The Rock Sandpiper was included; the Surfbird was not. The Common Redpoll was included; the Palm Warbler was not. At least six species known to breed (even if rarely) in the region were left out altogether: the Horned Grebe, Cattle Egret, Northern Hawk Owl, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Blue Grosbeak, Great-tailed Grackle, and White-winged Crossbill. This makes the inclusion of two rarities in the region utterly incongruous: Virginia's Warbler and, especially, the Red-throated Pipit. Sure, it's nice to have an excellent recording of calls of the latter, no matter how brief the cut (at 8 seconds the briefest treatment of any species), but then why not include the Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Eurasian Kestrel, Brambling, etc.?

Vocalization Types. This set is clearly intended to be a wide-ranging, if not comprehensive, collection of species and vocalization types, not just an identification aid (the Turkey Vulture and American White Pelican are included, after all). Nor is it, as the title suggests, simply a collection of songs. Most tracks begin with the primary

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song followed by additional song types and then a variety of calls. All but 59 species have at least two cuts (the American Coot wins the prize with 10), most of those with just one cut being water birds, and some having more than one vocalization or sound type within the cut (such as the Common Nighthawk, with the *peent* and the boom). The owls are especially well represented by more vocalization types than in any of the other regional CD collections for North America (check out the barking alarm call of the male Long-eared Owl). Some interesting variants are included, such as an unusual song of the Olive-sided Flycatcher, as are several subspecies (of the White-breasted Nuthatch and Fox Sparrow, for example). Some species, such as some of the rails and owls, are represented even by distinct calls for each sex, when they differ. Unfortunately, only call notes and no songs are included for the Evening Grosbeak and House Sparrow (both of which mimic and are therefore of special interest).

Although the variety of vocalizations deserves to be praised, the opportunity to be utterly thorough was passed by. There are not only region-specific song dialects that differ from dialects of the same species elsewhere in North America, there are distinctive vocalizations (not just dialects) uttered by populations (and perhaps even unrecognized species) *within* the Pacific Northwest. This is a very large region, after all. I was disappointed by the lack of a song of the Streaked Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*), one of the most distinctive songs in the complex, for example, as well as of regionally distinctive subspecies of the Willow Flycatcher, Gray Jay, and Bushtit. The very incomplete selection of Red Crossbill types (and no indication of which ones are included) is a huge oversight. There are some attempts to include subspecific information with some cuts, but they are inconsistent. One example is the White-breasted Nuthatch, the first two cuts of which are given simply as two different song types, while the next two cuts of call notes are labeled as being from "interior" and "coastal" birds; all four cuts should have been so labeled.

Lack of Precision in Recording Localities. Related to the lack of recordings of subspecies, one of my biggest complaints is the lack of more precise localities for the recordings. In many cases, more specific locality data would have allowed the user to determine which form had been recorded. The Fox Sparrow represents the best attempt at labeling each cut with its subspecies group. But since each group is comprised of more than one subspecies, the actual location would have added very useful information.

A further example is Swainson's Thrush, of which two distinctive forms (probably species) occur in the Pacific Northwest. The recording from Montana is obviously of an Olive-backed Thrush, but only the call is given (the description neglects to mention that the first calls are not the two-parted *whit-burrr* but rather the distinctive *prit* of this eastern form). On the other hand, the analogous liquid drop-like *whit* of the Russet-backed Thrush can be heard only in the background of the third cut, which otherwise features the harsher and less often heard alarm call. More precise locality data would also have made the Red Crossbill recordings more useful.

One can log on to <http://www.animalbehaviorarchive.org>, enter the Macauley Library catalog number in the search field, and thereby obtain a little more information on each recording. At the time of this writing, the only additional information available was the exact date of the recording, but it appears that more specific locality data may eventually become available. By listening to the entire recording on the website (from which cuts were taken for this publication), more information can be gleaned from the recordists' tag notes for some of the recordings. Only in this way did I discover that the first cut of Fox Sparrow song, labeled as being from the "slate-colored group," was recorded in the Cascades near Sisters, Oregon. This would place it in the subspecies *Passerella iliaca fulva*, which is a Thick-billed Sparrow, not a Slate-colored.

Several recordings were made entirely outside of the region. For example, calls of the Downy Woodpecker from Maryland were used when Keller's perfectly good cut in *Bird Songs of California* (Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 2003) could have

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been borrowed (it's clear that the drums of this species are the same on both CDs, after all). The Spruce Grouse recorded in Maine is of a subspecies quite different from the one found in the Northwest (maybe even a different species), and a Northern Mockingbird call from Florida is from an unnecessarily distant location.

Booklet Notes. The notes describing the vocalizations are in general good but uneven in quality and usefulness. They are helpful in the examples comparing the Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatchers but not for the Dusky and Sooty Grouse, where the former is said to be lower in pitch than the latter, though both my ear and the RavenLite sound-editing software indicate that they are in fact at the same pitch. The comparisons of woodpecker drumming are particularly useful. The first Yellow-rumped Warbler song is said to be similar to that of the Northern Junco (sic), but it sounds nothing like the simple trill of the Dark-eyed Junco cuts. Mimicry is mentioned in several species, but in others, such as Steller's Jay, Fox Sparrow, and Pine Siskin, it is ignored; only for the Gray Catbird, Sage Thrasher, and European Starling are some of the mimicked species mentioned. More notes on the behavior of the bird being recorded would have been useful, such as whether the call was given as an alarm near a nest, though sometimes it is noted if the bird is "agitated" (Red-breasted Nuthatch) or "perturbed" (Sora). The last two cuts for Brewer's Blackbird, for example, are not of typical call notes, and it would have been useful to know under what circumstances these particular calls were given.

Misidentifications. Finally, one last gripe is the misidentification of at least three cuts: the *chuck* notes attributed to a Hermit Thrush (second cut) are of a Varied Thrush, the first example of a Lesser Goldfinch song is actually of a Lawrence's Goldfinch, and the supposed call notes of a Nashville Warbler are those of a MacGillivray's Warbler. The third cut of the White-crowned Sparrow (labeled as a Mountain White-crowned Sparrow, "interior race," ML 42273) is definitely not that and is apparently the result of a mix-up in the studio; the recording with that catalog number at the ML website is indeed of a Mountain White-crowned Sparrow and is not the same as the recording on the CD. With a bit of searching, I found that the recording on the CD is actually ML 43976, recorded on the Oregon coast, and sounds like a White-crowned Sparrow that mistakenly learned a House Finch song—a fascinating and rare recording that I'm glad was included. Unfortunately, we are left without Keller's fabulous recording of the distinctive song of the Mountain White-crowned Sparrow from Hart Mountain, which to hear you must go to the website and listen to ML catalog number 42273.

Summary. The variety of vocalizations and heretofore unpublished vocalization types make this set one of the most valuable and interesting of publications by Keller and Cornell. The owls alone make it worth the purchase, and despite the few failings, it is an excellent product and one that all birders spending time in the Pacific Northwest should own.

I thank Will Russell for his insights and comments.

Rich Hoyer

Memoirs of a Wildlife Biologist, by David B. Marshall. 2008. Audubon Society of Portland, 5151 NW Cornell Rd, Portland, OR 97210; 503-292-9453. 220 pages, paper quarto, \$21.75. Issued without ISBN.

I decided to ignore the convention that discourages people from reviewing books by their friends because in this case there is some virtue in having a reviewer who knows the people and the subjects to a certain extent. I admit that I was a co-editor, with Dave Marshall and Matt Hunter, of *Birds of Oregon: A General Reference*. Marshall's memoir, issued privately through the Audubon Society of Portland, is far, far more than a personal recollection. It is in effect a compact history of the wildlife refuge system in the Far West, told through the experiences of someone who helped build the refuges from scratch.

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One reason why we are able to read this book at all is that the author came of age in the last years of the era in which wildlife jobs were available to people without college degrees. Marshall got his degree from Oregon State University at exactly the time when people with degrees were starting to enter the wildlife refuges' workforce in significant numbers after World War II. This meant that Marshall was hired at a very young age into jobs where he suddenly had more significant responsibilities than an entry-level person would have today. In short, he grew up with the refuge system and it grew up in part owing to his work.

Dave Marshall was a "kid birder" in Portland, Oregon, where he had unique access to figures such as Stanley Jewett (*Birds of Oregon*, 1940; *Birds of Washington State*, 1953), Ira Gabrielson (*Birds of Oregon*; *Birds of Alaska*, 1959), nature photographer/writer William L. Finley, and noted bird illustrator Bruce Horsfall. Along with a few boyhood friends, he developed the habit of birding northwest Oregon by bicycle after age 12, something that most parents would not allow, but his did. These birder kids of the late 1930s crossed the Cascade Range by bicycle when they were about 15, carrying camping gear, and ranged at large throughout the Portland area and the northern Willamette Valley, finding all manner of birds.

At age 17 in 1943, Marshall got a job as a fire lookout in the Fremont National Forest of southern Oregon, as did his friend Tom McAllister. They kept careful bird notes, and when Jewett suggested that they submit an article to the *Auk*, to their astonishment it was accepted. They were 18 years old, and shortly thereafter Marshall joined the Army Air Force, where he was trained as a B-17 ball-turret gunner and flew in several missions over Europe. One of the many unexpected anecdotes in this book is that Marshall first saw his *Auk* article in print at the out-of-the-way home of a British ornithologist, while waiting for a ship home to the U.S.

But this is just the curtain-raiser for the extraordinary chapters on the birth of the wildlife-refuge system, in which Marshall worked from shortly after the war until his selection as a senior official working on endangered species in the 1970s. Marshall was involved in early decisions about the direction of Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada (there is considerable detail about this early work) and the Sacramento refuge complex (where he was assigned to show Peter Scott his first wild Ross's Goose and escorted Jean Delacour). His years at Malheur during the 36-year reign of legendary manager John Scharff provide a vivid sense of how that refuge came of age.

Also of great interest are chapters related to the management of new refuges in Hawaii and Alaska and the remarkably informal sequence of events that led to the establishment of the three refuges in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. It was an era of highly personalized decision making, before the Environmental Protection Agency and before all manner of procedures required today, yet the government bureaucracy has always provided challenges, and this book explains how the biologists of the time dealt with those issues.

There is a certain whiff of the Wild West in these recollections. Witness John Scharff allowing a local rancher to use a refuge truck on his acreage in exchange for use of the ranch tractor for refuge work instead of trucking a refuge tractor 50 miles over dubious roads. I can't help but admire the willingness of people of judgment to make good but politically risky decisions and deal with the consequences. Certainly the wildlife official who was prepared to risk his career by making ecologically sound decisions in the face of a negative report from the General Accounting Office and a prodding Congress would be harder to come by today, when a field guide to the jellyfish seems a necessary desk companion to anyone working with the political establishment.

Marshall's years in Washington, D.C., and in the West working on endangered-species legislation are set forth here as well, with an extraordinary series of personal vignettes of interactions with people that can only be placed in the "who would have guessed" category, for example, the discovery of Defense Secretary James Schlesinger

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poking around a marsh all by himself, a secret birder outside the Beltway.

Other examples (among many) are trips to remote Alaskan outposts by float plane and homemade boat to decide what to do about an inconveniently located herd of musk oxen and an assignment to take two Sandhill Cranes to Tokyo as a gift to the emperor of Japan—and what happened when he unexpectedly had to find them overnight lodging in Anchorage (no, I won't tell you). An enlightening encounter with Senator Mark Hatfield, traveling incognito, changed the future of a stuffed armadillo (I won't tell you that, either). The neighbors in D.C. turned out to be far more than just Gabrielson.

There may be other, more formal histories of wildlife management in the western U.S. available, but I guarantee that none is more interesting or more moving in making clear what an honest, determined individual can do. The book has been produced somewhat informally, with some editing issues and unfortunately no ISBN, but it is an instant classic.

Alan Contreras