

(*Notemigonus crysoleucas*) (Rick Salmon, pers. comm.). Therefore, the rare combination of safe nesting islands and abundant small fish makes Head Lake suitable for Common Terns and sets it apart from the thousands of nutrient-poor, deep, coldwater lakes on the southern part of the Canadian Shield which generally have no terns.

Since the terns are currently not threatened by human activities, the need to post the islands is not critical at this time. The nesting islands are owned by the Crown (Dave Johnson, OMNR, pers. comm.), so legal protection from human disturbance could be implemented if warranted.

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Book Reviews

The Birds of South America: Volume I. The Oscine Passerines. 1989. by *Robert S. Ridgely and Guy Tudor*. University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. 516 pp. + xvi; 31 colour plates by Guy Tudor.

Several times in recent years this reviewer has used these columns to lament the dearth of good books on South American birds, a gaping hole in the ornithological literature which, little by little, is being plugged. When he heard that a four-volume work, written by Ridgely, one of the outstanding field ornithologists of the area, and

with pictures by Tudor, surely the best field-guide illustrator in the world today, was shortly to be published, he anticipated that this would be the ultimate book on the subject, rendering all subsequent efforts superfluous. Does the first volume in the series justify these hopes?

The answer, I think, is very

nearly, but not quite; not quite, but very nearly. But before going any further, I should clearly state that Volume I is a glorious book, vastly superior to its only predecessor, Meyer de Schauensee's *Guide to the Birds of South America*.

The plan of the book is fairly conventional. After some explanatory pages, there are two small but useful sections on habitats and biogeography (the latter with a number of maps), a couple of pages on migration, and a very sobering chapter on conservation (sobering, because it lists no less than 47 species whose status the authors believe to be a matter of concern; and those 47 are drawn only from the families dealt with in this one volume).

The bulk of the volume, 450 pages, is devoted to individual species accounts, preceded by the colour plates. Given the necessity of economy of space, the treatments of each species are reasonably comprehensive, consisting of notes on identification, similar species, habitat and behaviour, and range; a workmanlike map is given for each species. Nesting habits are not dealt with. Families and genera are each provided with some general notes prior to the species accounts.

The plates, 31 in this volume, with up to two dozen individual birds on each, are superb. If I had to pick out the best I would plump for number 10, Flower-piercers and Andean Conebills, but all 31 are excellent. Ironically, it is here that the book disappoints, because even

now only two-thirds of the species are illustrated. The authors themselves appreciated this deficiency, explaining in the preface that the huge diversity of species in South America precluded complete illustration; but it does nevertheless remain a disappointment. Accepting that some species are going to be omitted, the actual choice of species to be included was thoughtfully done, concentrating on those which were not elsewhere illustrated, or were of widespread distribution, with at least one member of each genus shown. Consequently, many species from southern South America were illustrated, often, I suspect, for the first time. I would criticise the decision to include some North American migrants; I myself would cheerfully have traded the pictures of several familiar warblers for, say, some the endemic *Myioborus* redstarts of Colombia and Venezuela, which are illustrated either very poorly or not at all in existing guides. A minor suggested improvement in the plate section would be to have text page number references for all species, not just some.

A conscious decision was clearly taken not to issue the various volumes in taxonomic order; in fact Volume I covers such families as Jays, Swallows, Thrushes, Wrens, Warblers, Tanagers and Finches. I am sure that this was a very canny decision, since there are included in the first volume some of the world's most gorgeous birds, and many wavering purchasers will be

irrevocably seduced by the colour plates of these. Having thus been hooked, they will have no choice but to go on and purchase Volume II, which will deal with some of those Neotropical families of archetypically "small brown jobs", whose identification really sorts the men from the boys — the Woodcreepers, Ant-birds, Spinetails and of course, the Tyrant Flycatchers.

Although there are no clearly defined and universally accepted names for South American birds in the languages of the continent, I feel that it would still have been a useful exercise to have included the more widely used names in Spanish and Portuguese, even though I do accept that a recent effort to produce a harmonised set of names in English of Holarctic species has satisfied neither British nor North American ornithologists.

As far as I can see, Volume I is remarkably free of error. The generic name of the North American shrikes is *Lanius*, not *Lanio*; and one might quibble over the fine detail of a couple of the range maps, but the fact that I pick up on such trivia serves to illustrate the overall high standard of accuracy.

My major criticism is directed at neither the author nor the illustrator but at the publisher. The book is expensive, and the whole set will be more so; consequently a less opulent style of production would have been appropriate. More especially, had a paperback

alternative been offered, as it was by the Princeton University Press for the Colombian guide, the whole set would have been much more affordable. In the species accounts, the left-hand margin is two and a half inches wide to accommodate the maps which are, however, only one or two per page, while in the remainder of the book this margin is left totally blank. Had this space been used more economically, the book could have been shortened by at least 50 pages, with a corresponding reduction in price (or the inclusion of extra colour plates).

Nevertheless, my criticisms of the work are all really very minor. If the subsequent three volumes maintain the high quality of the first, *The Birds of South America* will remain the standard work for many years. By virtue of its size and scope, it will not eliminate the crying need for good field-guides of the individual countries south of Colombia (the few that exist are distinctly sub-standard, although a couple of good ones are reputedly in preparation). Until that happens, I suspect that a lot of bird watchers will make themselves special four-slot shoulder bags to take this work into the field. Certainly no serious student of Neotropical birds could possibly contemplate being without this book, even though he or she might well need an understanding bank manager to obtain the complete set.

Checklist of the Birds of the Leslie Street Spit. 1989. compiled by J. Carley, H. Elliot and V. Higgins. Available from Friends of the Spit, P.O. Box 467, Station J, Toronto, Ontario M4J 4Z2. 12 pp. Free.

The Leslie Street Spit is a man-made peninsula approximately 5km in length, which extends out into Lake Ontario from the base of Leslie Street, Metropolitan Toronto. Although construction began in 1959, and is ongoing, the spit first began to take its present shape in the mid-1970s. Due to its lakefront location and diversity of habitats, the area quickly became recognized as one of the premier birding spots in the Toronto region.

This checklist takes the form of a pocket-sized card designed for use in the field. Species are listed in taxonomic order and four blank columns are provided after the birds' names to record sightings.

The occurrence of 284 species is documented, a total which is all the more impressive when one considers that the vast majority were observed in the past decade. Some of the more notable records include: Northern Gannet, Yellow-

crowned Night-Heron, Eurasian Wigeon, Sandhill Crane, Piping Plover, American Avocet, California Gull (first nest record for Ontario), Western Kingbird, Black-billed Magpie, Dickcissel, Lark Bunting and Lesser Goldfinch.

Notations are provided indicating species that have bred and/or been recorded on a Christmas Bird Count. Although no frequency or abundance status is given, species for which there are very few records are highlighted and further documentation of these birds is requested.

The inside back cover contains a series of annotations regarding various "spit specialties". Among these are short accounts of the phenomenal growth of the headland's Black-crowned Night-Heron and Ring-billed Gull colonies and the coincident decline of its nesting populations of Caspian Terns and Common Terns.

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