

Sometimes I sit down to write my short reviews and find there are no new books to write about. This month, however, the new titles are stacked to the ceiling, and I have chosen a dozen to review. Here they are, the usual mixed bag, presented in alphabetical order.

THE BACKYARD BIRDER'S JOURNAL by Howard Blume. 1987. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco. 310 pages; paperback \$12.95.

This book is designed as a combination notebook (234 pages) and guidebook (76 pages) for backyard birdwatching. The text consists of backyard feeder anecdotes, hints for increasing bird activity in your yard, and seasonal backyard bird lists from families in New York, Louisiana, New Mexico, Utah, and California, as well as information on the "art" of bird listing. If you have always wanted to compare your backyard list with R.T.P.'s, you can now do it, since Peterson's annotated list is right there in appendix 1. More useful appendices are "Attracting Birds to Your Backyard" and "Your Backyard as Habitat." As Abraham Lincoln once wrote, "People who like this sort of thing will find this the sort of thing they like."

BIRDING AROUND THE WORLD, A Guide to Observing Birds Everywhere You Travel by Aileen R. Lotz. 1987. Teale Books. 272 pages, photographs; clothbound \$18.95, paperback \$10.95.

Aileen Lotz's book is designed for persons who go bonkers when all of those nature tour catalogs come in the mail. She whets the travel appetite with birdwatching possibilities from Texas to Tanzania, including information on travel precautions, tour companies, and, most of all, birds to look for. Do not look for much of a serious nature here or for detailed itineraries for trip planning. The coverage is uneven, for while Peru is praised in twelve pages, Texas gets but one, and Churchill is summed up in one paragraph. Writing of Churchill, the author recommends this as an area where "you can watch millions of shorebirds in breeding plumage." What? Thousands, maybe, Aileen, but not millions! This is decent armchair traveler reading, nothing more.

THE BIRDS OF ISRAEL by Uzi Paz. 1987. The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington. viii + 264 pages, 60 color photos, 29 black-and-white illustrations, endpaper maps. \$26.95.

Interest in the ornithology of Israel has bloomed in recent years, dramatically so in the case of its spectacular spring and fall migrations. Millions of birds of prey (really, millions!) as well as countless individuals of other species pass through the narrow Israeli land mass during their Eurasian-African migrations, and western birdwatchers are taking advantage of this phenomenon in greater and greater numbers. Uzi Paz has written a good introduction to Israel's 470 bird

species, with each given a short accounting, including description, general range, behavior, and distribution in Israel. There is a three-page bird-finding guide and the bibliographic references number 127. The photos are first-rate. Recommended for anyone interested in the region's birdlife.

EASTERN BIRDS. xvii + 496 pages, 1300+ color photos.

WESTERN BIRDS. xvii + 496 pages, 1300+ color photos.

HOW TO IDENTIFY BIRDS. 318 pages, 700+ color photos. All by John Farrand, Jr. 1987. McGraw-Hill, New York. \$13.50 each.

The first two titles are Mr. Farrand's latest entries into the field of photographic bird guides. In fact, the author has had a hand in all of the popular photographic bird guides of the 1980s. The photos in this doublet are mostly very fine indeed, but from my point of view, the use of photographs, no matter how good, in a field guide is hardly more than a sales ploy. Photographs cannot compare with well-delineated color illustrations in depicting subtle form and color, critical elements of a good field guide. Although Farrand's text is really quite good, it will by and large be ignored by serious birdwatchers, who will stick with more traditional guides.

In *How to Identify Birds* the author breaks down the process of identification into a series of steps. His first "field mark" is habitat, followed in order by size, behavior, shape and posture, color and pattern, and finally, voice. The reader, upon viewing a bird, is instructed to work through these steps, each of which is accompanied by color photographs and a detailed series of color-coded charts. If it sounds complicated, it is. In fact, I showed this book to six birders (two advanced, two intermediate, and two beginning) and asked them how useful it would be to them. All thought it was confusing and overly complicated. One called it scary; another, unbelievable. I call it a good plan in theory but too busy on paper. I am not convinced many birdwatchers will take the time to study this guide, and thus, its purpose will remain unfulfilled.

ERIC HOSKING'S BIRDS, Fifty Years of Photographing Wildlife by Eric Hosking with Kevin MacDonnell. 1987. The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington. 224 pages, approximately 300 color and black-and-white photographs; paperback \$17.95.

Eric Hosking is, of course, one of the truly remarkable wildlife photographers of our time -- an extraordinary technician and a gifted observer of wildlife. The present volume, previously published in America under the title *A Passion for Birds* highlights his travels and bird portraiture. The quality of the reproduction in this edition is mediocre; look for the original.

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF HAWAII AND THE TROPICAL PACIFIC by H. Douglas Pratt, Philip L. Bruner, and Delwyn G. Berrett. 1987.

Princeton University Press, Princeton. xx + 498 pages, 43 color plates by H. D. Pratt, 2 color photos; clothbound \$50, paperback \$19.95.

Princeton University Press has developed into a faunistic field-guide factory, happily, one that puts out high quality products. This work covers the Hawaiian Islands, all of Micronesia, central Polynesia, and Fiji. The species accounts are up-to-date (all of the authors have done extensive recent research in the Pacific), the introductory material on habitats and conservation is timely, and the appendices, which include regional checklists and maps, are an important addition. Pratt's plates are superb. Worth noting is the price of the paperback version, which at under \$20 is a very good buy.

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE SEABIRDS OF THE WORLD by Peter Harrison.

1987. The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington. 317 pages, 764 color photographs, 24 black-and-white plates, 321 maps; paperback \$24.95.

In 1983, Peter Harrison's *SEABIRDS* burst onto the scene with great fanfare and arm waving. Four years and one revision later, the enthusiasm for that monumental guide has hardly diminished. Now, Harrison has written a more compact field guide to seabirds, and although it is an accomplished, well-designed field guide in its own right, it suffers by comparison with the prototype. First, there are far fewer illustrations in this book. Most species have but two photos, except the frigatebirds, skuas, and gulls which have four. A number of the photos are out of focus. Second, the text is much reduced in the basic three categories of identification, habits, and distribution. Third, the captions on the plates merely identify the species and do not point out field marks. On the plus side, this guide includes 321 species, nine more than the author's previous work. In sum, if you have the original guide, and you are not a seabird addict, you are probably all set.

HISTORY OF THE NUTTALL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB 1873-1986 by

William E. Davis, Jr. Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, No. 11. Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge. xi + 179 pages, 26 photos. \$20.

It has been fifty years since C. F. Batchelder wrote the early history of the Nuttall Club (N.O.C.). With the publication of this memoir, North America's oldest ornithological organization now boasts a well-written, well-researched, and spirited account of its 113-year existence. Ted Davis takes us from the formative Brewster years through the Peters/Griscom era to the present leadership. He details the development of the club's publication series, examines the important philosophical and compositional changes in the club's membership, and ponders the future role of the N.O.C. Brief biographies of current members are included. Despite the curious lack of an index, this volume

is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in the development of the American ornithological scene.

IN SEARCH OF MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS, photographs by Galen Burrell and text by Ron Hirschi. 1987. Graphic-sha Publishing Co., Ltd., Tokyo. 100 pages, 89 color photos. \$26.50.

This is, quite simply, the best book of bird photography I have seen in many years. From the introduction one learns that "the sequence of photos follows a path from the ocean's edge to the mountain tops, beginning in coastal swamps of Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana lowlands ... through forest and farmlands ... [to] the Rocky Mountains." Burrell's compositions are outstanding, beautifully balanced masterpieces, the photographic equivalents of Bateman paintings. I salute the publishers, who have produced many wonderful collections of Japanese landscape photographs for publishing a book on American birds. I can't wait for the next one.

NEW GENERATION GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE by Christopher Perrins. 1987. University of Texas Press, Austin. 320 pages, 1500+ color illustrations. \$14.95.

The *New Generation Guides*, under the general editorship of David Attenborough, are a well-conceived, well-executed, innovative approach to nature guides. The present volume on birds is divided into four parts. "The Evolution of Birds" includes discussions of physiology, speciation, and classification. "The Directory of Species" has good, though rather small, pictures and includes many more portraits of juveniles and birds in flight than the average field guide. "The Life of a Bird" concerns bird development, behavior, migration, and nesting. And "The Ecology of Birds" covers bird populations, protection, and conservation. All this in a book of standard field guide size and price -- an exceptional value.

BRIAN E. CASSIE, who regularly contributes this column to *Bird Observer*, has recently moved with his family from Millis to Foxboro. (It is not yet known if the famous hordes of Millis Christmas Count chickadees have also relocated.) Noted for his wit, if not for common sense, Brian introduced the article above with the following quote from Max Reger, which the editor thought more suitable at the end of his column: "I am sitting in the smallest room in the house. I have your review in front of me. Soon it will be behind me."