

ABOUT BOOKS

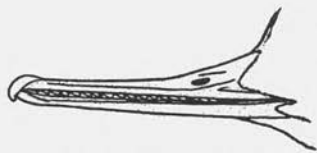
A Bird Guide of a Different Kind

Karsten E. Hartel

Mark Lynch's history of field guides in *Bird Observer* (February 2001) made me remember a two-volume paperbound set that my father found in a used book store and gave to me. This was three years after I received my first Peterson for Christmas in 1955. After a short search in the basement, I found the books: a second edition of Charles B. Cory's *The Birds of Eastern North America* published in 1900 in Boston by Bay State Publishers.

Volume one is devoted to water birds and the second volume to land birds. Together the two volumes total 380 pages.

These volumes represent the antithesis of a Peterson field guide, and maybe that was why I remember using them often and for different reasons than the Peterson. Cory's illustrations of heads and whole birds, not even comparable to Peterson's, were stilted composites of worked-over photographs or gray-tone washes of mounted



Merganser serrator.

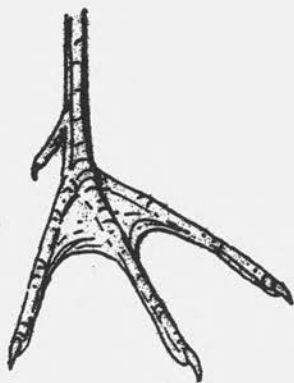
specimens. However, what I found most fascinating were the detailed pen and ink line-drawings of body parts! Wow, I could see the tube nose on tube-noses, the comb-like edges on the inner side of the middle toe of herons, the serrations on a merganser's bill, and details of the toe webbing or lack thereof in *Calidris* species that Cory placed in five genera. Because the

volumes are loaded with nomenclature, both anatomical and systematic, something about them appealed to my sense of detail.

Cory's 9 1/4 x 7 1/4 format was essentially filled with keys, as we know them today. These were informational couplets that separated different taxa at various levels, to be used when one had the bird in hand. Similar species could be separated based on one or two characters. For example the "Esquimaux" Curlew could be told from the Hudsonian Curlew by the lack of barring on the axillars, and the Long-billed or Sickle-billed Curlew from the Hudsonian by the color of the axillars and the fact that the bill was usually over four inches in length. Using facts like these, Cory covers most of the bird species from east of the ninetieth meridian. That meridian is close to the hundredth meridian that Peterson used for his Eastern Guide. Maybe it was really Cory's idea to split the country's birds into east and west!


Charles Barney Cory (1857-1921), a native Bostonian, entered Harvard in 1876, but left in 1877 to travel and collect. While at Harvard, he came under the influence of J.A. Allen and William Brewster. He published several major works on the birds of the Caribbean and then on the birds of Illinois and Wisconsin. After his death, the





Ereunetes pusillus.
(Foot.)

final volumes of his massive work, *Catalogue of Birds of the Americas*, were completed by Hellmayer and Conover. Cory was curator at the Field Museum of Natural History and Vice President of AOU. He was a member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club from 1876 to 1909. Edward Gruson (1972) calls him a "blithe spirit" of American ornithology because he was a wit, raconteur, ballroom dancer, sportsman, songwriter, and outstanding field and museum naturalist. In addition to a number of other species, Cory described *Calonectes diomedea* in the Bulletin of the Nuttall Club in 1880, and the species is now called Cory's Shearwater.

Cory's guides were published well before Griscom and Peterson's time, but I have a feeling that both authors used Cory's popular works in formulating their ideas and skills in field identification. Certainly, Cory's popular works grew out of many museum-based technical works that also form the backbone of today's field guides and bird-banding manuals. 

References:

- Cory, C. B. 1900. *The Birds of Eastern North America Known to Occur East of the Ninetieth Meridian. Part 1. Water Birds. Key to families and species.* 2nd Ed. Boston: Bay State Publishers.
- Cory, C. B. 1900. *The Birds of Eastern North America Known to Occur East of the Ninetieth Meridian. Part 2. Land Birds. Key to families and species.* 2nd Ed. Boston: Bay State Publishers.
- Field Museum of Natural History. 1918-1949. *Catalogue of Birds of the Americas and the Adjacent Islands in Field Museum of Natural History* by Charles E. Hellmayer and Boardman Conover. Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago. Part 1 by Charles E. Hellmayer and Boardman Conover; parts 2-3 by Charles B. Cory (Part 3, revised and continued by C.E. Hellmayer); pts. 4-5 initiated by Charles B. Cory, continued by Charles E. Hellmayer; Parts 6-11 by Charles E. Hellmayer.
- Gruson, S.E. 1972. *Words for birds. A Lexicon of North American Birds with Biographical Notes.* Quadrangle Books, New York.
- Lynch, M.L. 2001. A task of no small difficulty: A critical history of the North American Field Guide. *Bird Observer* 29 (1): 47-56.

Karsten E. Hartel is a Curatorial Associate in Ichthyology at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology and has collected fishes (and done some birding) all over the world. He is the lead author of an upcoming book Inland Fishes of Massachusetts (in press) to be published by the Massachusetts Audubon Society. When not at sea, he resides in Arlington, MA.