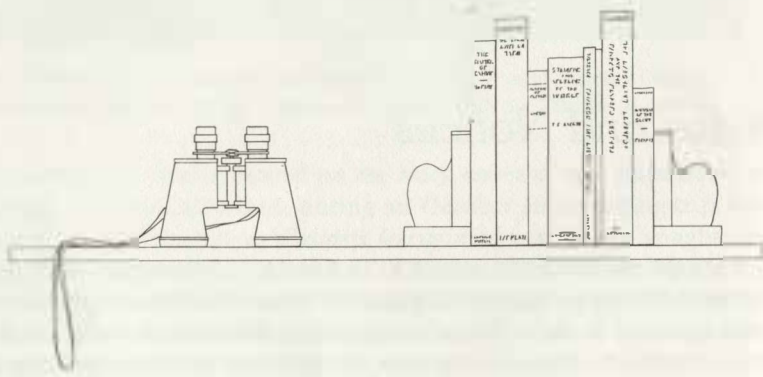


BUENAS NOTICIAS FROM CHIAPAS — North American birders only recently became aware that a population of the Resplendent Quetzal *Pharomachrus mocinno* still existed in the Lagos de Montebello National Park in Chiapas, Mexico. Still more recent (and, perhaps, even more encouraging) news is that the cloud forest area which the birds inhabit has been set aside as a biological reserve, mainly to protect quetzals and orchids. We visited the area in April 1979, and found Resplendent Quetzals to be present in good numbers; the wardens patrolling the area were polite but firm in warning us not to disturb the birds; local people with whom we spoke seemed proud of the quetzals' protected status. All of this, of course, is indicative of a giant step in the right direction.

Reviews

Edited by

ELAINE COOK



A Field Guide to the Seabirds of Britain and the World. — G.S. Tuck, illustrated by Hermann Heinzl. 1978. London: William Collins, Sons & Co. Ltd. xxviii + 292 pp., 48 color plates, line drawings, maps. £5.25.

Publisher's address:
William Collins, Sons & Co. Ltd.
14 St. James's Place
London SW1A 1PS England

We need a good identification guide to the seabirds of the world. Most field ornithologists, I'm sure, would agree. There are several reasons why (despite widespread demand) such a work has not been forthcoming. One is that seabird taxonomy is in an unsettled state; some forms are still practically unknown, and there is much disagreement as to which allopatric forms represent full species. Another reason is that important information on seabirds has been published in a number of different languages. Yet another reason — perhaps the most telling one — is that matters of flight action and silhouette are often crucial in identifying seabirds; these points can be learned only through field experience, which can be gained only through a great deal of expensive ocean travel.

That is the crux of the problem: it is not enough for an author and illustrator to simply decide to produce a seabird field guide; good intentions alone will not pull it off. And this book proves it.

A Field Guide to the Seabirds of Britain and the World covers, in brief fashion, the penguins, albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters, storm-petrels, diving-petrels,

tropicbirds, pelicans, gannets and boobies, cormorants, frigatebirds, phalaropes, sheathbills, jaegers and skuas, gulls and terns, skimmers, and alcids. The author adopted an "all-or-nothing" policy as regards bird families; that is, since a couple of pelican species are to be found regularly out at sea, all pelican species are included in the book. This may avoid a confusing incompleteness but it also necessarily takes in far too many complex identification problems for a book of less than 300 pages. We would have been better served by a volume of this size treating just the Procellariiformes, perhaps, or just the gulls.

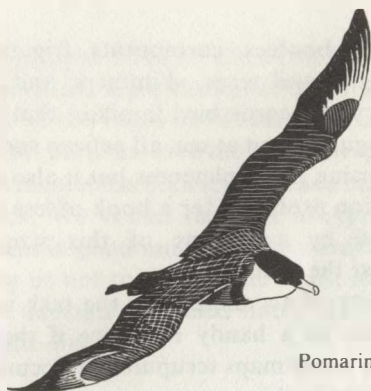
Despite the basic impossibility of accomplishing the task within the available space, we might yet embrace this as a handy reference if the illustrations were excellent, the text illuminating, the range maps scrupulously accurate. Unfortunately, none of these claims could be made in this case.

The illustrations are by Hermann Heinzel, a European artist whose past work has shown some promise. This promise seems not to have been fulfilled in the present volume. Many species among the families covered are — need I say it? — *difficult to identify*; illustrations of them, to be useful, should seize upon and faithfully portray every possible detail of silhouette and plumage pattern. The plates in this book do not begin to approach this ideal. They must have been done in far too much haste. There are occasional flashes of excellence (again indicating Heinzel's potential), but taken as a whole the illustrations are extremely disappointing.

I looked critically at the illustrations of all of the included species with which I am familiar: almost none seems to capture the "jizz" or general impression of the bird, and many are inaccurate in plumage details or grossly out of proportion. Several of the gulls are depicted with bills that are far too thick; some of the shearwaters on plates 8 and 9 are given double-length necks; the differences in silhouette among the *Sterna* terns on plate 42 are not given enough emphasis, and the useful underwing patterns of these birds are not pictured at all. A labelling error (probably not the artist's fault) on plate 36 has bird no. 3c masquerading as an immature Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*, although it was clearly intended to be an immature Franklin's *L. pipixcan* (despite the fact that the tail-pattern is shown inaccurately!). Perhaps what disturbed me most was the eerie feeling that I had seen some of the illustrations before. The immature Short-tailed Albatross *Diomedea albatrus* (plate 3, figure 1b) and the flying adult Ross' Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* (plate 39, figure 2d) are both uncannily similar to earlier and better paintings of the same birds by Don Eckelberry (in Pough 1957, *Audubon Western Bird Guide*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y.; and in Pough 1951, *Audubon Water Bird Guide*, *ibid.*; respectively).

The text is equally disappointing. To begin with, its coverage is quite incomplete. Despite the stated intention to deal with all field-recognizable subspecies, some obvious ones are omitted. No mention is made of the fact that the Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea* has a localized large, heavy-billed form, *P.n. confusa*, which might conceivably prove to be a distinct species (see references in Watson 1975, *Birds of the Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic*, American Geophysical Union, Washington, D.C.). Another case closer to home which this book fails to mention involves Xantus' Murrelet *Endomychura hypoleuca* and its two very well-marked races, *E.h. hypoleuca* and *E.h. scrippsi*; again, there is a chance that these two might be specifically distinct. The treatment of the skuas *Catharacta* here, with no mention of the highly distinctive Chilean Skua *C. chilensis*, borders on the ridiculous.

The English nomenclature adopted here is sometimes more curious than the taxonomy. You will not find the name "Olivaceous Cormorant" nor the alternative

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*

“Neotropic Cormorant” listed anywhere in the book (not even in the index!); instead, *Phalacrocorax olivaceus* is treated to the name of “Bigua Cormorant” — not the preferred name, as far as I know, in any part of the bird’s range. The species *Larus belcheri*, known to its friends as the Band-tailed or Belcher’s gull, is called “Simeon Gull” in this book (which, incidentally, provides no separate description for the Atlantic form, which may well be a different species). No source is given for the taxonomy and nomenclature followed.

The comments on field identification in the text are probably best ignored. The text tells us, for example (p. 111), that Common and Arctic terns (*Sterna hirundo*, *S. paradisaea*) are “almost impossible to distinguish at sea” — which will be news to those experienced observers who do the almost-impossible on every pelagic trip. Immature Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers (*Stercorarius pomarinus*, *S. parasiticus*) are matter-of-factly stated to be indistinguishable at sea. Most of the points offered on storm-petrel identification are worthless for field use.

The range maps provided are tiny (with ten world-maps to the page), hence errors have to be major to be noticeable. Here are a few of the major errors that I noticed. The maps do not show Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*, Buller’s (New Zealand) Shearwater *P. bulleri*, or Short-tailed Shearwater *P. tenuirostris* ranging anywhere near the Pacific coast of North America. Audubon’s Shearwater *P. lherminieri* is not shown occurring off the Pacific coast of southern Mexico, although it has recently proven to be regular there. The Northern Gannet *Sula bassana* is not indicated to occur in the Gulf of Mexico (or even as far south as Florida), but the Brown Booby *S. leucogaster* is shown as *breeding* all along the Gulf coast of the United States! Bonaparte’s Gull *Larus philadelphia* is shown wintering to halfway down the west coast of South America (it is accidental even as far south as Panama); the Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus* is not mapped as occurring in the New World at all, but the Little Gull *L. minutus* is indicated to have a Nearctic breeding range occupying the entire Great Lakes region. In all of these cases the correct information should have been easily obtainable, and I shudder to think what errors may lurk in the range maps for species and geographic areas which are less well known.

Since I hate to write a review which is 100% negative, I should mention that the 25-page section on the seabirds of the British Isles, written by John Parslow, seems to be very well-done and interesting. However, I doubt that this in itself will be considered worth the price of the whole book.

To return to my original premise: we need a good identification guide to the seabirds of the world. Unfortunately, I doubt that we will see one any time soon. The ornithologists who really do know something about seabirds (and there are several)

will also realize how complex the problem is, how much work would be involved in producing such a guide; no doubt most of them will feel (and rightly so) that their time is better spent on their own research. For the time being, field observers who go to sea will have to struggle along on information gleaned from a great variety of sources. The field guide reviewed here would be best left at home; under field conditions, it would probably prove to be much more confusing than helpful. — K. K.

A Guide to the Birds of Venezuela — Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee and William H. Phelps, Jr. Notes accompanying plates by Guy Tudor. Illustrations by Guy Tudor, H. Wayne Trimm, John Gwynne, Kathleen D. Phelps, and Michel Kleinbaum. 1978. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. xxii plus 424 pages, 40 color and 13 halftone plates, line drawings, map. Hardbound \$50.00, paperbound \$19.95.

Publisher's address:
Princeton University Press
41 William St.
Princeton, NJ 08540

During the early 1970's the birdwatcher going to the Bird Continent carried only Meyer de Schauensee's *Guide to the Birds of South America* (since it was the only work available), used its few illustrations and its terse descriptions ("Similar to number 44, only browner") as well as could be expected, and let most of the nondescript birds go unidentified. The arrival of this new guide is certain to change that situation. Although the book covers only Venezuelan birds, the species that occur within Venezuela's boundaries make up more than 40% of all those known from the entire continent; and this book covers these species so well that it will be useful as supplementary material in practically any area between Panama and Tierra del Fuego.

A Guide to the Birds of Venezuela is another fine feather for the cap of its senior author, R. Meyer de Schauensee, who (through his several books) has probably done more than any other person to open up South America for the amateur birdwatcher. William H. Phelps, Jr., is also to be congratulated; it must be remembered that he and his father personally discovered much of what is known of the Venezuelan avifauna. But inevitably, many birders will view this volume as Guy Tudor's masterpiece: because it is largely the quality of Tudor's work which makes this book so far superior to any previous bird guide for the Neotropics.

Those readers who were not familiar with the name of Guy Tudor previously are in for a shock when they open this volume. Thirty-seven of the 53 plates are by Tudor, and they are incredibly well-done; as field-guide plates go, they can be compared only to R.T. Peterson's recent work or to the classic plates by Eckelberry in Pough's trio of bird guides. Unlike some other illustrators, who have their forte in one particular group of birds, Tudor seems equally at home with everything from ibises to hummingbirds, from flying eagles to flycatchers. His treatment of plumage (with sharply defined remiges and rectrices, and perfectly textured body feathering) is perhaps the most realistic we've seen, and he handles the facial expressions of birds — a very difficult point to capture — with nearly as much sensitivity as George M. Sutton.

It appears that Tudor has purposely tackled the most difficult groups himself, i.e. those for which identification may rest partly upon shape (birds of prey in flight) or upon subtleties of dull plumage color (flycatchers, antbirds, etc.). The other plates (nine by Trimm, five by Gwynne, two by Mrs. Phelps) deal mainly with more

distinctive families, and they are quite good in their own right. Excellent pen-and-ink drawings by Michel Kleinbaum are scattered through the text, illustrating more than 80 additional species, mostly waterbirds.

The other part of Guy Tudor's contribution is equally significant: he wrote the facing-page commentary for all of the plates. These notes are often more direct and useful than the relatively few comments on identification in the text proper, and they are marvels of concise presentation of criteria for field determinations: clearly the work of a person who has been there, who has dealt with these problems in the field.
— E.C., K.K.

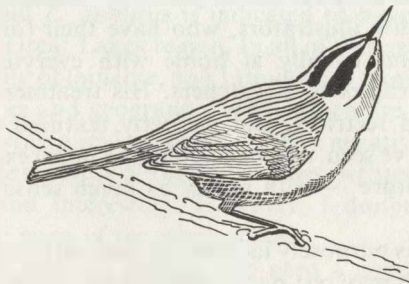
The Warblers of America (Second Edition) — Ludlow Griscom, Alexander Sprunt, Jr., and other ornithologists of note. Revised and updated by Edgar M. Reilly, Jr. Illustrated by John Henry Dick. 1979. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc. xix + 302 pp., 35 color plates, line drawings, maps. \$19.95.

Publisher's address:
Doubleday & Company, Inc.
501 Franklin Avenue
Garden City, NY 11530

The first-edition *The Warblers of America* (1957) — with its authoritative text edited by Griscom and Sprunt, and its fine illustrations by J.H. Dick — was an excellent book; it could have been termed a mini-classic. This "revised and updated" version is very poor. These two statements may sound potentially contradictory, so they require some explanation.

We do not want to sound too critical of any of the persons involved: no doubt there were good intentions all around. But the approach adopted for this edition was most unfortunate. Perhaps because of a desire to retain as much as possible from the first edition, the revision was carried out in a half-hearted way, with many of the new comments placed in brackets and sandwiched into the original text. The effect is choppy and erratic, and the resulting product is a mishmash of new and archaic information; it certainly cannot be relied upon as an up-to-date reference work on the Parulidae.

A few examples will serve to illustrate the unreliable and incomplete nature of this revised edition. The Ground-Chat *Geothlypis poliocephala* is still blithely stated to be resident in southern Texas, even though there has hardly been a valid record there in decades. There is no mention of the fascinating recent history of Kirtland's Warbler



Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorus*

Dendroica kirtlandii and its man-assisted struggle against cowbird parasitism, nor of the occurrences of the Rufous-capped Warbler *Basileuterus rufifrons* in the southwestern U.S. The "lumping" of the Myrtle and Audubon's subspecies groups of the Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata* has been dealt with by simply dropping the account of Audubon's (except for the fine-print technical data at the end of the species chapter); the original Myrtle account is left to fill in for the entire species, thus managing to imply that wintering Yellow-rumped are common only in the southeastern sector of the continent. The Prairie Warbler *D. discolor* chapter says nothing of Val Nolan's exhaustive research on this species. No mention is made of the occurrences of "eastern vagrant" warblers in the West, despite the spectacular dimensions that this phenomenon has achieved recently in terms of number of individuals detected, number of birder-hours spent looking for them, and number of theories proposed to account for their appearances.

In an introductory chapter on classification in the first edition, Ludlow Griscom stated that "For the purposes of this volume . . . the classification and names of the new A.O.U. Check-list are followed throughout." That statement appears unaltered (on p. 10) in this revised edition — however, A.O.U. taxonomy is *not* followed here; rather (as stated on p. xi), this edition follows the order and names proposed by Lowery and Monroe in the Peters *Birds of the World* checklist. This arrangement will be unfamiliar to the majority of readers. To compound the confusion, Griscom's "Suggested Reclassification of the Warbler Genera" is faithfully reprinted (pp. 289-290) from the first edition, without even a footnote to point out that most of Griscom's proposed changes in this case are not accepted by taxonomists working today!

Many other examples could be cited to show how clumsily this revision was handled. In accordance with the new taxonomy the Painted Redstart is placed in the genus *Myioborus*, leaving *Setophaga* as a monotypic genus containing only the American Redstart *S. ruticilla*; yet a footnote on p. 139 still refers to the Painted as one of "the two *Setophaga*," thus distinct from "the tropical Redstarts in the genus *Myioborus*." Skutch's fine "Introduction to the Warbler Family" has obviously been rewritten — it cites papers published as recently as 1974 — but it is not *stated* to have been rewritten; a footnote matter-of-factly informs us that it was reprinted from an original publication in 1954. The "Preface to the Revised Edition" contains a garbled account of what has happened to the taxonomy of the genus *Parula*. And so on.

A few positive things may be said about this new edition. The chapters on warblers of the West Indies and of Central America have been rewritten by their original authors (James Bond and Alexander Skutch, respectively) and thus are informative and up-to-date. The two chapters that attempt to interpret warbler songs in words (one by Griscom and one by W.W.H. Gunn and D.J. Borror), reprinted unaltered, are still interesting. Many of the plates by J.H. Dick are very attractive (although — despite two decades of advancement in color printing technology — the reproduction of these is no better than it was in the first edition). Some of the short essays by Sprunt, Griscom, and others, while perhaps not strictly applicable to the present-day situation, are still fine bits of nature writing.

All in all, however, the net result of revision has been to turn this volume from a gold mine into a mine-field, a trap for the unwary. Readers who dip into this volume for facts will have no way of knowing whether they are getting current, out-of-date, or completely incorrect information. For this reason, we can recommend this book only as first-rate evidence of how difficult it is for an outsider to "revise and update" what was once a good bird book. — K.K., E.C.