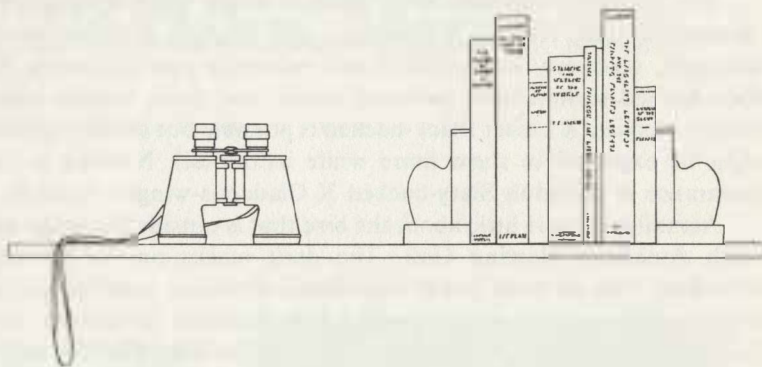


## Reviews

*Edited by*

ELAINE COOK



**To a Young Bird Artist: Letters from Louis Agassiz Fuertes to George Miksch Sutton** — Commentary by George Miksch Sutton. 1979. Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press. ix + 147 pp., illus. \$9.95.

Publisher's address:  
University of Oklahoma Press  
1005 Asp Avenue  
Norman, Oklahoma 73109

Louis Agassiz Fuertes was an American painter of birds, active in the first quarter of this century, whose reputation has proven quite durable. His name still draws instant recognition today, more than fifty years after his death. Fuertes was not the first bird painter, nor the best ever; but he was one of the first to make a comfortable living at it (and thus devote sufficient time to developing his skill), and certainly the most talented of his era. As such, he had a strong influence on many young ornithologists and artists who later became influential themselves, thus keeping his reputation alive. Perhaps ironically, his name has survived better than his artwork, which is rarely seen today.

Some recent writers have persisted in claiming that Fuertes was the greatest bird painter who ever lived. This is a disservice to the man's memory, for such hyperbole invites, even demands, contradiction: surely in this expanding field there are half a dozen artists working today who can match Fuertes's best. Better to remember him as one who, in his own era, raised the discipline to a new level, setting a new standard of excellence for subsequent generations. That is enough; there is no need to subject him to petty comparisons against those who followed.

In 1915, at the height of his career, Louis Fuertes was a very busy man. Aside from the massive demands of his artwork, he had a family to raise, lectures to deliver, community activities in which to play an active role. The last thing he needed (or so we might imagine) was to receive persistent letters from a teenaged boy asking for artistic advice. Yet not only did Fuertes receive such letters, he wrote long, thoughtful, eloquent responses; and his youthful correspondent, George Miksch Sutton, went on to become an ornithologist-artist-author admired around the world.

Unquestionably Fuertes had a profound influence upon Sutton — affecting his artwork, his ornithological career, even his basic philosophies of living. The recipient of such a life-changing experience might in some cases feel fiercely possessive about it, as if the correspondence were too personal a treasure to be shared with anyone. Fortunately for the rest of us, Sutton is too large a man to harbor such selfish considerations; he has generously chosen to publish the letters he received from Fuertes — accompanied by a narrative which fleshes out the man, the subjects discussed, and the era in which the correspondence took place. The resulting slim, unpretentious volume is a classic, a gem. In some ways, it is one of the most important bird books published during this decade.

Although I found the book delightful from beginning to end, there is one note which may prove jarring for some readers: the occasional reference to birds shot for use as artistic subjects. Such a practice would certainly be inappropriate for beginning bird painters today, but it must be remembered that near the turn of the century *all* aspiring ornithologists (not only the artists) were taught to collect specimens as a first step toward knowledge, even as beginning entomologists today make insect collections. Sutton and Fuertes followed the tradition of Audubon, combining science and art with a very real sense of reverence for living things; the birds that died for the sake of human knowledge they brought back to life, painstakingly, on paper or canvas. Having this kind of background gave Sutton an intimacy of experience with the *individual* birds depicted, of a sort that could be matched by few bird painters working today. And — make no mistake — Doc Sutton really loves birds, in a way that is thoroughly unsentimental but profound; this feeling shines through his writing, his artwork. If squeamish readers will set aside any feelings of antipathy raised by the references to collecting, they will find *To a Young Bird Artist* quite rewarding.

For this is indeed a rare and special book. One should not presume, because of the title, that it will be of interest only to beginning bird portraitists. The Fuertes letters range through subjects far removed from birds and the techniques for depicting them. So does Sutton's commentary, to an even greater degree. Yet even those sections dealing exclusively with bird art may be read with pleasure by the non-artist. Sutton's modest but candid prose, reliving his early efforts, triumphs and failures, is a profile of earnest young ambition to excel; while between the lines of Fuertes's letters we may read the patience, pride, and occasional exasperation of a generous mentor with a promising protege.

What emerges in this volume is a slice of cultural history, illuminated by a unique view of two great men: Fuertes as a teacher, Sutton as a student. Those of us who believe that the history of bird appreciation is worth recording must regard this book as a classic. And we must be impressed (and grateful, too) that Dr. Sutton, still of keen mind and productive in his eighties, continues to enrich the birdwatching literature. —

— K. K.

**Penguins** — Roger Tory Peterson. 1979. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin. x + 238 pp., illus., col. photos, map. \$25.00.

Publisher's address:  
Houghton Mifflin Co.  
2 Park Street  
Boston, Mass. 02107

Today's question: Can Roger Tory Peterson get away with writing a bird book that has less than universal importance?

The question is not meant in a disrespectful way, nor is it put entirely in jest. At a rather early age Peterson became the best known popular-ornithologist in North America; by the time he was ready to travel more widely, it was a short step up to being the best known in the world. In recent years it has occasionally seemed that he was most famous for being famous: the superlatives had been used up, and writers copied each other endlessly in describing his world-reknown. It has become de rigeur, when instituting a new award or medal in popular conservation or ornithology, to present the award first to Peterson: the effect is to legitimize the award as much as to honor the man.

Although Peterson has remained modest and unassuming in the midst of all this, his books have long reflected his center-stage role. First, of course, there were the Field Guides, carried by every birdwatcher. Then there was *Birds Over America*, which summarized his impressions of birding on this continent. Its coverage was thorough, complete; there was no room for a sequel. *Wild America*, co-authored with James Fisher, interpreted all the natural wonders of all of North America for both American and European audiences. Another Fisher-Peterson collaboration, *The World of Birds*, was of global significance. A common denominator of all these books was their wide appeal. All were appropriate to, and contributed to, RTP's phenomenal reputation.

Now what would happen if he were to write a completely different, thoroughly offbeat sort of book? Suppose he were to write an informal, chatty book about a single family of birds. Suppose — for the sake of argument — that he chose an odd, atypical family of birds, one that the majority of birdwatchers never get to encounter in the wild. Would that break his string of universally-significant books? Perhaps. Does he care about that? I doubt it. Roger Tory Peterson has just written a book about his favorite family of birds, the penguins. I get the impression that he wrote it just for fun. And you can read it for precisely the same reason.

In overall appearance this is a sort of penguin scrapbook, presenting a visual effect which is not displeasing. The margins are very broad, allowing room for numerous Peterson drawings, most of which are purely decorative rather than illustrating any vital point. Many of these margins lack drawings, however; and these empty margins, the large typeface, and the amount of space left between lines and paragraphs all contribute to the airy, informal feeling of the book. The reader feels invited to browse, rather than necessarily reading the fairly extensive text from beginning to end.

Peterson is a talented writer. This point is not often emphasized. It is more fashionable to promote him first as an artist (a fashion instigated, no doubt, partly by dealers of limited-edition art prints); even the dust-jacket of *Penguins* starts off by describing RTP as a bird painter. However, this book is clearly not intended to stand

or fall on the basis of its artwork. The artwork, and even to some extent the photographs, are there to enliven the text. This, primarily, is a book to be *read*.

Very enjoyable reading it is, too. Although Peterson's affection for the penguins is often discernable, he skirts sentimentality. Moreover, he succeeds in communicating a little of what life must be like for a penguin, without slipping into anthropomorphism — which must have been a difficult task. Peterson does have something of a tendency to ramble (both in his writing and in his public speaking), but this does not detract at all from the total effect: the anecdotes he tosses in are always interesting, even when they are not directly relevant, and their inclusion adds to the relaxed air of informality. Clearly Peterson is having fun, saying what he wants to say, not bowing to any dictum about brevity. On the other hand, when pursuing some particularly dramatic subject (such as the response of Adelie Penguins *Pygoscelis adeliae* to the sudden appearance of a patrolling predatory seal, or the harsh conditions under which Emperor Penguins *Aptenodytes forsteri* choose to raise their young), Peterson's prose can be as direct and tight-lined as anyone's.

In examining the many black-and-white drawings scattered through *Penguins*, I could not resist the temptation to compare them to another series of Peterson drawings: those done to illustrate *Wild America*. I have always felt that the latter, taken as a group, ranked among Peterson's finest work — indeed, among the finest nature art I've seen anywhere. They are mostly done in a scratchboard technique, sharply black and white; all of them have a studied, precise, finished look; all appear ready to be framed. The drawings done for *Penguins* are of a different style, more sketchy, less exact, filled in with an ink wash technique. Although I found these somewhat less pleasing intrinsically, their style is well suited to the informal air of the penguin book. (Incidentally, *Penguins* contains two drawings — fur seals on p. 150, and Least Auklets *Aethia pusilla* on p. 203 — lifted straight from *Wild America*, allowing the reader to compare the styles directly.)

These sections of color photographs add much to the interest and decorative quality (and, no doubt, to the price) of the book. Few of the photos struck me as outstanding works of art, but all are of good quality and appear to be reproduced well.

Although the book deals entirely with the Southern Hemisphere and mostly with the Subantarctic and Antarctic regions, far removed from this continent, something about Peterson's current position among field ornithologists in North America is unwittingly revealed by the omission of one subject: the identity of skuas. Keen field observers here have recently paid great attention to the skuas (genus *Catharacta*). This surge of interest has been brought about partly by taxonomic questions (the six recognized forms have been claimed to constitute anything from one to five species) and largely by the realization that more than one of the forms or species may occur off the North American coastlines. As a result, all expert birders living in seaboard states have developed some basic knowledge and a deep curiosity about the taxonomy, distribution and field identification of the skua forms; any expert who had the chance to visit southern waters would undoubtedly devote much time to studying skuas. But the subject goes unmentioned in *Penguins*. To be sure, there are several mentions of skuas (as neighbors to and predators of penguins), even photographs and drawings, but they are never given any identity. This omission seems to reflect a mild irony: although Peterson's reputation was founded upon his Field Guides (the cornerstones of recognition afield), it has been decades since he has made any original contribution to the serious study of field identification — or even displayed much interest in it.

But that is all right. Peterson's appeal is to the masses, not to the somewhat

lunatic fringe of experts. While the great majority of people with a simple interest in birds will not care about the complex taxonomy of the skuas, they will love Peterson's penguins. They will also learn a great deal about the birds, about the ecological relationships of life forms in the far southern oceans, and about the importance of conservation efforts in remote regions. But they will learn all this without working at it: the whole book is pleasant fare, attractively served up; it goes down like ice cream. Roger Tory Peterson is to be congratulated for having done a superb job, once again, in bringing nature to the general public. — *K. K.*



Adelie Penguins  
*Pygoscelis adeliae*

**Birds: readings from Scientific American** — with introductions by Barry W. Wilson. 1980. San Francisco, California: W. H. Freeman. viii + 276 pp., illus. \$17.95 hardbound; \$8.95 paperbound.

Publisher's address:  
W. H. Freeman and Company  
660 Market Street  
San Francisco, California 94104

Twenty-five articles on birds originally published from 1952 to 1979 in *Scientific American* are collected in this book. *Scientific American* has built a reputation of publishing rigorously accurate articles on scientific subjects, such as high energy physics, written by experts in the field so that the subject can be understood by scientists from other fields and by the general public. The articles in this collection discuss the diversity of birds, bird flight, migration and navigation, evolution, behavior, physiology and song, and interactions between birds and humans.

Some of the articles in the collection are true classics, such as C. J. Pennycuik's 1973 study of the soaring flight of vultures as viewed from a motorized glider, Timothy C. and Janet M. Williams' 1978 examination of oceanic mass migration of land birds, Stephen T. Emlen's 1975 publication on the ability of Indigo Buntings to orient by the stars, and William T. Keeton's 1974 summary of homing pigeon orientation by sun, stars, polarized light, magnetism, and possibly smell and ultrasound. Other interesting articles reprinted here include the study of breeding isolation between Thayer's, Herring, Glaucous, and Iceland gulls, by Neal Griffith Smith and a 1970 examination of the effects of persistent pesticides on bird reproduction, written by David B. Peakall.

The collection would be well suited as supplementary reading for an ornithology course. It will also be good reading for any birdwatcher interested in a survey of "scientific" ornithology from the last three decades. The paperback edition is sturdy, should survive normal use with no ill effects, and at \$8.95 is an excellent value. — *E. C.*

**Working Bibliography of Owls of the World** — Richard J. Clark, Dwight G. Smith and Leon H. Kelso. 1978. *National Wildlife Federation, NWF Scientific/Technical Series, No. 1.* xiv + 391 pp. \$9.00.

**Working Bibliography of the Bald Eagle** — Jeffrey L. Lincer, William S. Clark and Maurice N. LeFranc, Jr. 1979. *National Wildlife Federation, NWF Scientific/Technical Series, No. 2.* xi + 219 pp. \$9.00.

Publisher's address:  
Raptor Information Center  
National Wildlife Federation  
1412 Sixteenth Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036

The bibliography may well be a format unfamiliar to many of our readers. Basically this is a list of citations to books or journal articles on a particular subject, or by a particular author. Bibliographies are surprisingly scarce in ornithology (in the agricultural literature, by contrast, you trip over them constantly). The few available bird bibliographies are either on such esoteric subjects or are sufficiently expensive to preclude their purchase by most of us. The two reviewed here, however, are exceptions to both generalizations; they are inexpensive, and they are on subjects of considerable general interest for birdwatchers.

The cores of both bibliographies are their lists of citations (5000 for owls and 2000 for the Bald Eagle) to journal articles and books on their respective subjects. Both citation lists cover literature up to about 1977 or 1978 and appear commendably complete. The only gap that immediately springs to mind is that Bent's essay on the Bald Eagle, published in his life histories series, is not included in the Bald Eagle bibliography. The accuracy of the citations, however, is rather more variable. I checked twenty-five of the citations in the owl bibliography and found one author's last name spelled incorrectly, one citation with an incorrect page number, one citation without the date of publication, and several minor spelling errors. Nine of the ten entries I checked in the Bald Eagle bibliography were perfect but the page numbers of the tenth were in error. I was pleased to find only these few errors; other bibliographies oftentimes have as many as 20% of citations marred with major errors.

The owl bibliography begins with a discussion of how to use the book, taxonomy and distribution of owls, and a list of English and foreign language common names of the world's owls. After the list of citations, there are indices by geographic subdivision and genera (e.g., California — *Tyto*), genus and subject category (*Otus* — anatomy), and by genus (*Athene*).

The Bald Eagle bibliography begins with a discussion of the Bald Eagle's current status, then after the citations there is a permuted keyword index (which results in entries similar to those in the owl bibliography, but interfiled in one alphabetical sequence) and a dictionary with definitions of the keywords.

Both of these bibliographies would be worthy additions to the bookshelves of field ornithologists interested in the birds of prey. — E.C.

**The Larousse Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe** — by Bertel Bruun, illustrated by Arthur Singer. 1978. New York: Larousse. 319 pp., illus., maps. \$7.95 (paperback).

Publisher's address:  
Larousse and Co., Inc.  
572 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10036

You may already own this book. It was published by McGraw-Hill as *Birds of Europe*, and before that under the title *The Hamlyn Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe*. If you don't own the book, Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* (1974, 3rd edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin) is more accurate and comprehensive (even though its format is slightly less convenient). —E.C.

**Proceedings 1978 Crane Workshop** — James C. Lewis, Editor. 1979. Fort Collins, Colorado: Colorado State University. iii + 259 pp., figs., tabs. Price not known.

Publisher's address:  
Colorado State University Printing Service  
Fort Collins, CO 80523

These proceedings of the second Crane Workshop, 6–8 December 1978, Rockport, Texas include the full text of thirty-six papers presented at the meeting. The papers are arranged in four groups: cranes along the Platte River of Nebraska (7 papers), useful techniques in management of Sandhill Cranes (8 papers), distribution and status of cranes (6 papers), and ecology of cranes (15 papers). Most of the papers are concerned with Sandhill Cranes *Grus canadensis*, but Whooping Cranes *G. americana*, Siberian Cranes *G. leucogeranus*, and Hooded Cranes *G. monacha* are also discussed. Worthwhile for anyone with a particular interest in the Gruidae. —E.C.

