

RECENT LITERATURE.

Peterson's 'Field Guide to the Birds.'—Field ornithology in North America has been revolutionized by the development of the high-powered binoculars, while a new generation of bird students has arisen who have no desire or need for collecting specimens. Curiously enough, however, our literature has failed to keep full pace with this change of method and attitude. Many of our popular books have, it is true, added notes on "field characters" to the time-honored detailed descriptions of specimens "in the hand," but the art of field identification which has been brought to such a high stage of perfection by our leading field students has not been given the attention to which it is entitled. Mr. Peterson, in the little book¹ before us, attempts to supply this lack and with notable success.

He states frankly that his book is "designed to complement the standard ornithological works" and to furnish field marks by which the live birds of eastern North America may be "run down by impressions, patterns, and distinctive marks, rather than by anatomical differences and measurements." Only the outstanding characters peculiar to a species as compared with its near relatives are given, which is just what the student of the live bird demands. Formerly he must needs work these out for himself from a long and detailed description and was very often misled by placing undue reliance upon unimportant characters.

As an example of how tersely a bird may be described in terms of field marks, we might say that a Magnolia Warbler is a Warbler with yellow, black streaked breast, and a white band across the *middle* of the tail; indeed the last character alone will distinguish it at any season from any other of our many Warblers. We must still, however, depend upon the standard works and their colored plates to get a general idea of the appearance of all of our Warblers and to learn what a Warbler is. Then we are prepared to make good and intelligent use of Mr. Peterson's little book.

His book is most serviceable, and at its best, in the treatment of the water birds which have of recent years come into their own in attracting the general interest of our bird students who previously had devoted their attention almost exclusively to the land birds. Water birds must, in most cases, be studied at a distance and in varied lights which render it very difficult to distinguish details of color. A knowledge of a few prominent field marks, however, such as are given on the pages of this little book, will often render identification easy without considering color.

Mr. Peterson is fortunate in possessing sufficient artistic ability to bring out these field marks in original drawings, which are in black and white as they should be, while all the species of the same group are represented in

¹ A Field Guide to the Birds Giving Field Marks of All Species Found in Eastern North America. Text and illustrations in color and in black and white by Roger Tory Peterson. Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Company. The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1934. Pp. i-xxi + 1-167. Price \$2.75.

exactly the same position which facilitates comparison. The Ducks, for example, are all shown, in one series of drawings, as we see them sitting sideways on the water, while in another they are depicted on the wing. The Gulls are all shown in a hovering position so that size, and extent of black and gray markings, may at once be compared. In the Sparrow plates little arrows point to characteristic and distinctive markings.

In his text the author mentions also characteristic actions, notes, and usual habitats, but leaves seasons and dates of occurrence to the standard works. There are also colored plates of the Warblers, the more brightly colored Grosbeaks, Tanagers, Orioles, etc., the figures being all side views facing to the left and necessarily very small, but arranged so that similarly colored species are close together.

Few books are free from error and in the present work the author's knowledge of field identification seems to be far ahead of his acquaintance with plumages. He says, for instance, that the young of the Towhee and of the Black-throated Blue Warbler are like the females while as a matter of fact in both species the adult plumage (except for slightly duller primaries) is acquired at the post-juvinal molt so that in the autumn adult and young males are alike as are adult and young females. The author's use of the terms "young" and "juvenile"—indefinite words at best—is sometimes confusing and it is unfortunate that the use of the exact terms proposed by Dr. Dwight are not more generally used today. In some species mention is made of the juvinal plumage, while in others—as the Goldfinch and Cowbird—it is omitted. These, however, are but minor faults and are shared by other authors as well, while they are but incidentally concerned with Mr. Peterson's real objective. On the general conception of the work and its admirable consummation we heartily congratulate him. We feel sure that a proper use of the volume will make for more accurate identifications and the elimination of many errors that undoubtedly result today from the sight records of over zealous field ornithologists. Sight records have come to stay and will form an increasingly important part of ornithological data but the beginner must not think that, even with the aid of Mr. Peterson's excellent book, he can instantly recognize every bird in the off-hand manner of the expert with years of experience behind him. He should heed Mr. Peterson's statement, which we strongly endorse, that accurate field identification is a "matter of seeing a bird often enough and knowing exactly what to look for" and, also, that a thorough acquaintance should be made with a state or local list, so that an observer can state off-hand the comparative rarity of a species and the dates between which it is likely to be seen. Without this knowledge his sight records will receive doubtful recognition and their publication may only tend to obscure accurate knowledge instead of adding to it.—W. S.

Brand's 'Songs of Wild Birds.'—If anyone thinks that nothing new is possible in the way of bird literature let him examine this interesting