

REVIEWS

EDITED BY WALTER BOCK

A Guide to the Birds of Venezuela.—Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee and William H. Phelps, Jr. 1978. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press. xxii + 424 pp., 40 color and 13 black-and-white plates by Guy Tudor, H. Wayne Trimm, John Gwynne, and Kathleen D. Phelps, line drawings by Michel Kleinbaum. Hardback \$50.00, softback \$19.95.—South America has long been one of the most intriguing places to see or study birds, but books for the identification of its avifauna have been extremely slow in appearing. For the most part those that have appeared have been inadequately illustrated, a factor that severely limits their use by the amateur. The present volume, a pleasant surprise both in quality and compactness, covers Venezuela, one of the most interesting of the continent's countries.

The book is organized in typical guidebook style with acknowledgments, a note about travel to Venezuela, and introductory material about the country, followed by descriptions of the 1,296 species that are known to occur there. The plates are conveniently grouped in the center, and the end papers have a map of Venezuela depicting prominent features of the country's topography.

The illustrations in "The Birds of Venezuela" set it apart as the most useful book on South American birds. The plates prepared by Guy Tudor are no less than stunning. Upon receiving my copy I found myself staring at Tudor's plates for hours at a time. The *pièce de resistance* is Plate 30, upon which 48 species of small flycatchers are depicted, *all* of them easily identifiable! The plates by John Gwynne are also excellent. Those by Wayne Trimm are adequate for identification, but the birds are rather stiff and their quality is variable. The line drawings by Michel Kleinbaum are very attractive and well done. Kathleen Phelps contributed two plates of some of Venezuela's more spectacular birds.

Guy Tudor's field work has paid off. He knows most of the birds he has depicted and it is obvious from his work. A few of his illustrations, however, are slightly misleading to me. The *Pygiptila, Thamnophilus*, and *Percnostola* antshrikes on Plate 22 are all too similar in shape, the *Mecocerculus stictopterus* on Plate 30 is too large and is depicted as an "upright" flycatcher rather than the more horizontally perching warbler- or vireo-type bird that it is, and the inclusion of the feet on the nightjars on Plate X seems unnatural. There are other small things with which I personally disagree, but all of these are totally overshadowed by the beauty, overall accuracy, and usefulness of the plates. Tudor's eye for design is often amazing, as in his treatment of the flying macaws on Plate 8. His depiction of hawks and eagles in flight is superb. Thanks in part to the large amount of reference material made available to him by his friends and associates, his renditions of these birds are extremely accurate and, by showing them from a side angle rather than an overhead angle, they are very useful. My main criticism of the illustrations is that the plates are often too crowded and the coverage of identifiable forms is often minimal. At least some attention is given to northern migrants, but more illustrations would help, especially for Venezuelans who may not have access to the many books on North American birds.

The text, although basically well done and accurate, is not outstanding. Each family account begins with a paragraph giving generalized information about the particular group. One item that does not appear in any Neotropical guidebook that would have been most helpful in "The Birds of Venezuela" is a guide to the families. Most North American or European birdwatchers are not familiar with the great diversity of South American birds, and without having some idea of what family a bird is in they would be hard pressed to know where to begin looking for it in the book. A general description of the variations in a family with silhouettes to illustrate these differences would be most useful. The species descriptions generally describe each bird in a typical "head-to-tail" fashion and are fairly museum-specimen oriented. Information on how to separate similar species is usually lacking. For many species the addition of a single note or statement would often serve to allow them to be easily and quickly identified. I also find disappointing the lack of useful information on vocalizations, especially when one of the foremost authorities on Neotropical bird sounds lives in Venezuela. The voice descriptions are, in general, of little value as they often describe sounds only in such terms as a "sharp penetrating chirp," a "metallic trill," or a "low whistle." Also, no differentiation is made between calls and songs. Voices are an important means of locating birds and should be accurately presented. Often a species is common in a given area, but with no knowledge of its voice a person may not find it. On the other hand, the authors have included a fair amount of information on habitat that will be quite useful to the reader. The inclusion of information on elevational ranges is important and valuable.

Much of the criticism I have of the text is reduced by the inclusion of an excellent series of plate notes by Guy Tudor. These notes, which are presented on the plate legends for each species, give the most useful marks for field identification. Tudor also includes comments on species not depicted on the plates. The effect of these notes is to make the center section of the book stand by itself as a small, extremely usable field guide.

The publishers have done an excellent job in printing. They are to be especially praised for the excellent reproduction of the color plates. The total quality of the book should be looked at carefully by other publishers of natural history books. In hours of looking through the text I have discovered few typographical errors. One point about which I am most concerned is why the hardbacked edition costs \$30.00 more than the softbacked one. The cover and binding on my review copy are strong and well done, but certainly not worth \$30.00! I purchased a softbacked copy for use in the field and it has held up well even after 2 months of being thumbed through on an almost daily basis by groups of Aguaruna-Jivaro Indians who were enthralled at seeing "their" birds depicted in color. My advice to purchasers is to buy the softbacked book and have it handsomely bound in leather, for about \$5.00, on their next trip to South America!

The best book available on any area in the Neotropics is Ridgely's on the birds of Panama, but "The Birds of Venezuela" is certainly the best one available for a South American country. I hope that future authors of books on Neotropical birds will include more information on living birds and give more attention to field identification. Despite my criticisms of "The Birds of Venezuela," it is still an excellent book. The plates and notes by Guy Tudor are outstanding and make the book a must for any student of South American birds.—JOHN P. O'NEILL.

Guide to the Young of European Precocial Birds.—Jon Fjeldså. 1977. Skarv Nature Publications, Denmark. 283 pp., 39 color plates, 29 figures, many drawings. 200 Danish Kroner (ca. \$33.00).—This is not so much one book as three—it is a guide to the identification of precocial chicks; a portfolio of color printings; and a systematic paper.

The text provides a broad overview of the biology of families with precocial young, and a general description of the chicks, that would be useful in introductory courses. Fjeldså's major thesis, which is largely verified, is that chicks of all species can be identified. Accordingly, each species is discussed in detail, with data on plumage characters, similar species, measurements of newly-hatched young, banding information, and general distribution. These accounts are generally good, although some questionable information is included. It is, for example, difficult to accept that newly-hatched Common Loons weigh 52–92 g, whereas Arctic Loons average 75 g. Previously unappreciated characters that permit the separation of allied forms are illustrated. Excellent black-and-white drawings depict chicks of many species; some show variation within a group or a species. There is a glossary of common names in several European languages.

The book is enhanced by a portfolio of 39 outstanding color plates showing the young of most species. Fjeldså's skill as an artist and a careful observer is undeniable, and the plates are the strong point of the book. Chicks are depicted accurately in lifelike postures, and in my copy the color rendition (except Plate 26) is excellent. I know of no other book with such a wealth of illustrative information on downy plumages. One minor slip appears in the Social Plover (*Chettusia gregaria*, Pl. 20), which is said to be identifiable by the presence of an undepicted hind toe.

Fjeldså's secondary thesis—the systematic aspect of this book—aims "to demonstrate the conservatism of downy plumage patterns and its (sic) usefulness (sic) in establishing phylogeny." The idea is not original. In 1915, P. R. Lowe emphasized the value of downy plumages, and they played a major part in Delacour and Mayr's classic revision of the waterfowl. Subsequently they have been used successfully to test relationships in a wide variety of taxa including ratites and tinamous (Jehl 1971, *Trans. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist.* 16: 291–302), grebes (Storer 1967, *Condor* 69: 469–478), grouse (Short 1967, *Amer. Mus. Novitates* 2289), and shorebirds (Jehl 1968, *Memoir* 3, *San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist.*). Indeed Fjeldså's justifications for using downy plumages (p. 12) parallel arguments I advanced earlier (1968: 7).

The conservatism of downy plumages is convincingly demonstrated by a series of illustrations depicting the commonality of color pattern within a wide variety of taxa. These pattern diagrams are a major contribution because chicks are poorly represented in most collections, and patterns are difficult to reconstruct from prepared material. Note, however, that pattern interpretation is sometimes necessarily subjective, and thus the patterns should be used with caution.

Fjeldså's goal of using downy plumages to establish phylogenies is less successful. In a series of figures, he presents possible phylogenetic pattern transformations in grebes, waterfowl, grouse, and shorebirds.

This technique, too, is not new (cf. Jehl 1968, op. cit.), but Fjelds  is the first author to apply it so broadly. Unfortunately, he has chosen not to acknowledge, or has cursorily dismissed, the contributions of previous workers on chick plumages and, his taxonomic discussions are characterized by a lack of references of any kind. Thus, while his suggested grouse phylogeny (Fig. 13) is said to be supported by "anatomy studies, analyzed by cladistic methods," there are no supporting citations. In addition, the construction of the transformation diagrams is not explained, and one can only guess at their derivation. The result is phylogeny by fiat. Because of this cavalier treatment the reader is left interested but unconvinced, which is too bad because downy plumages unquestionably offer the possibility for fresh insights in phylogenetic studies. One example: Fjelds  points out (p. 106) that the few patterned species of rails are reminiscent of jacanas, rostratulids, heliornithids, psophiids, and perhaps hemipodes; this observation clearly requires further development.

Those interested in Fjelds 's interpretations of relationships in specific taxa—which mostly conform to previous results—should consult the text. Here I will only comment briefly on one aspect of shorebird relationships (Fig. 16). Basically, Fjelds  suggests that the downy pattern of "primitive" (not defined) calidridine sandpipers (*Aphriza*, *Calidris canutus*) can be derived from that of "primitive" (not defined) plovers (*Eudromias*, *Zonibyx*, *Oreopholus*, *Charadrius falklandicus*) via that of the turnstones (*Arenaria*). (Subsequently, the calidridines gave rise to two lines, the snipes and woodcocks, and the tringine complex.) I find this difficult to accept because the turnstone pattern is not easily derivable from either the plover or calidridine configuration. Further, recent studies by J. G. Strauch confirm P. R. Lowe's view that the plover and sandpipers are not particularly closely allied, and I (1968, Condor 70: 206–210) have argued that there is no strong evidence (including downy plumages) of close relationship between *Aphriza* and *Arenaria*. Fjelds 's interpretation, then, seems to conform more closely with the "classical" view of plover-sandpiper relationships than with data from downy plumages.

In my view, the turnstone pattern is reminiscent of the tringine sandpipers. Surprisingly, Fjelds  seems to agree (p. 136) for he notes that "the arrangement of bands on the back of Turnstone chicks may approach that in Godwits and Spotted Redshank." Fjelds 's interpretation is further confusing because while Fig. 16 suggests that *Arenaria* is an "intermediate," the figure caption states that it represents "a side branch with degenerate powder-puff down." I fail to appreciate how a tringine-like pattern with degenerate down can give rise to the complicated calidridine pattern with its highly specialized powder puff feathers, and how the calidridine pattern, in turn, reverted to the tringine state. A more reasonable view is that turnstones are tringine relatives. Fjelds  and I disagree on other details of wader phylogeny, and other taxonomists will doubtless find other areas of disagreement. At present, lacking detailed documentation, Fjelds 's phylogenetic ideas seem best considered as interesting working hypotheses.

Some comment on the production of the book is unavoidable. It is marred by abundant flaws in grammar, usage, and hyphenation. Capitalization is sporadically Germanic. The English meaning of words is often not appreciated. "Chickens" is used regularly (but not consistently) for "chicks," leading to such confusing combinations as "sandgrouse chickens." Button Quail are said (p. 99) to live "secretly (sic) in dense ground vegetation . . . are shy, escape . . . by running, and are very hard to blow up" (= flush?). Misspellings in scientific names and terminology as well as in common words occur on nearly every page. Proofing by a native English speaker would have eliminated these problems, which, initially, are a source of minor distraction but eventually become extremely annoying.

Taxonomic emphasis aside, the book invites comparison with Harrison's "Field guide to the nests, eggs, and nestlings of European birds." Those wishing a field guide will find Harrison's book more useful because of its size, format, broader scope, and low cost. Fjelds 's book is of significant value for its detailed descriptions of chick plumages and for its excellent portfolio—an important contribution in itself. I would hope that his taxonomic ideas, which are well worth pursuing, will be documented in more detail in subsequent publications.—J. R. JEHL, JR.

Parental Behavior in Birds.—Rae Silver (Ed.). 1977. Benchmark Papers in Animal Behavior, 11. Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, Inc. xviii + 430 pp. \$24.50.—Thirty-two papers published previously, mostly in standard journals, have been photocopied and arranged into five parts: initiation of breeding, pair formation and nest building, egg-laying, post-laying behavior, and post-hatching behavior. An introduction to the entire compendium and short introductions to each part contain numerous additional references. Two-thirds of the papers were published more than 20 years ago; only three were published within the last 10 years.

In assembling these papers Silver clearly examined an extensive literature and partitioned the information reasonably. However, in general I disagree with the papers chosen. Part 1 seems the weakest; all

four papers are outdated. A. J. Marshall published important papers on the initiation of breeding more recently than 1957, and amazingly to me, no paper by Farner or King is included, even in the references! The four papers comprising Part 2 are good, but limited in scope. Breeding nexuses other than pairs are given short shrift, and no treatise on the use of nest materials in courtship is included. Three of the five papers comprising Part 3 are of very limited historical interest only, and no additional references are listed in the editor's comments. I find the information included under "laying" in "A New Dictionary of Birds" (Landsborough Thomson, Ed. 1964, London, Nelson) published 14 years ago far more complete. Post-laying behavior, Part 4, receives the most thorough coverage, but then one-third (11 of 32) of the papers are placed in this one of five parts. Here too antiquity of the papers chosen weakens the coverage. Host specificity in cuckoos is treated by a paper published in 1927; numerous recent papers cover the topic more thoroughly. Part 5 consists of eight papers; several are good choices. Although Skutch (1935) is of historical interest to the subject of communal breeding, I would have chosen a more recent paper that discusses attempts to understand the phenomenon (e.g. Brown 1974).

In summary, I cannot recommend that ornithologists buy "Parental Behavior in Birds" for reference or teaching. In its place I suggest the appropriate topics in Landsborough Thomson, Kendeigh's (1952) "Parental care and its evolution among birds," and papers in recent Proceedings of International Ornithological Congresses, which are written by authorities on the subject and often are reviews.—GLEN E. WOOLFENDEN.

A New Guide to the Birds of Taiwan.—Sheldon R. Severinghaus and Kenneth T. Blackshaw; Chinese translation by Lucia L. Severinghaus. 1976. Taipei, Mei Ya Publ. xiii + 222 pp., illustrated by Susan R. Blackshaw, 8 color plates, 107 line drawings, 1 map. \$6.95 (available from Harwood Books, 3943 N. Providence Rd., Newtown Square, Pa. 19073).—Greatly improved in every way over Dr. Severinghaus' earlier book (*A guide to the birds of Taiwan*, 1970), this guide provides identification material for the 201 (of 380+) species of birds most likely to be encountered in Taiwan (Formosa). Forty-three species are illustrated in color and another 100 in the line drawings. The color plates are fairly good and the birds can be identified with them, but reproduction is poor. The line drawings are mostly good, and adequate for identification. The text is brief, containing: length (in inches and centimeters), descriptive material, some comparisons with other species, habits, voice, status, distribution (geographical, seasonal, and altitudinal), and habitat. Most of the species covered could be identified using this text, with the exception of some difficult hawks, eagles, and warblers. The book is actually much shorter than its 222 pages since nearly half of it is taken up by the Chinese translation of each section. Some new information on status, distribution, habitat, and behavior is published here, making this the most up-to-date reference on Taiwan birds even though it isn't complete. An appendix lists some birds by behavior and habitat, another gives a complete list of the birds of Taiwan. Two organizations that would assist bird-watchers are specified so that visitors to this pleasant island will be able to get some guidance to its birding hot-spots and pleasures. Since all 15 of Taiwan's endemic species are covered in this book, all the birds of Taiwan can now be found in current bird books on Japan, Hong Kong, and SE Asia. The relevant extralimital books of most use in Taiwan are mentioned in the bibliography.

Hopefully this book will create interest in Taiwan's fascinating birdlife, so that the necessary conservation measures will be taken, aided by birding tourism and international efforts. The recent establishment of a high mountain reserve to protect the Mikado and Swinhoe's Pheasants is evidence of a swing in this direction. Dr. Severinghaus was instrumental in getting this area set up. Some laws were recently passed severely curtailing hunting and the sale of mounted birds, another hopeful sign. The authors have done a good job on this guide and anyone interested in Taiwan's birds will find it useful and essential.—BEN KING.

A Colour Guide to Hong Kong Birds.—Clive Viney and Karen Phillipps. 1977. Hong Kong, Government Press. 122 pp., 48 color plates, 8 line drawings, 1 map, paperbound. U.S. \$4.50 (plus \$1.50 for surface or \$5.00 for air postage delivery in USA. Order from: Hong Kong Government Information Services, Sale of Publications Office, Beaconsfield House, Queen's Road Central, Hong Kong—checks or M.O.s payable to "Hong Kong Government").—This attractive and useful identification book covers 327 of Hong Kong's 375 species, 275 of which are illustrated in color, the remaining not illustrated. A list of the species not covered, with their last date of occurrence, is appended. The text for each species is on the page facing the plate on which it appears. Attractive and well-done, the colorful plates dominate the reader's attention, and by using them, one could readily identify most of the species depicted. A

number of helpful flight paintings are included. There are some errors (all due to an inadequate specimen collection in Hong Kong). Instead of the Eastern Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus spilonotus*), the Western Marsh-Harrier (*C. a. aeruginosus*) has been painted and described in the text as well; this is important as they are probably separate species, and the Western does not occur in eastern Asia. The crest of the Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) is tawny rather than white in breeding plumage, which further distinguishes it from the White Spoonbill (*P. leucorodia*). The plumes on a Little Egret's head are limited to the two long ones. The Chinese Babax is unrecognizable. The Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) shown is a western Eurasian form that doesn't occur in eastern Asia.

The text for each species is brief, containing: status, seasonal distribution, field marks, habitat, habits, some songs, and often particular places to look for the bird. The textual material is mostly succinct and adequate for identification. However, as is usual for the simpler guides, many of the hawks and eagles could not be identified because so much of importance is left out. The order of species is partially standardized, the deviations being in favor of some larger and smaller bird groupings and other groupings by habitat. The 17 pages of introductory material contain information on how to use the book, how to identify birds, and places to look for birds in Hong Kong. The colored map on the inside covers is a good topographical one showing main roads and the birding areas mentioned in the text. Those who have not visited Hong Kong (and many who have) tend to picture it as a vast city split by a huge harbor and cannot imagine birding there. However, there are good places even on Hong Kong island and a great number of good areas on the mainland New Territories. On a recent visit (March 1978), we easily tallied 93 species in one day without trying for a big list. It is the only place in mainland China that is readily accessible and is well worth the visiting birder's time.

Comparison with "A new guide to the birds of Hong Kong" by M. Webster (1976—reviewed in *Auk* 94: 801) is necessary. The present book is highly recommended for the beginner or visitor to Hong Kong as its wealth of color plates covers most of the birds that are likely to be seen. More serious birdwatchers will want both books, as Webster's text is better for identification and contains descriptions of all species that occur in Hong Kong, as well as illustrations of most of them. Visitors to Hong Kong need not fear any longer that they will not have good books to help them identify the birds of this fascinating area.—
BEN KING.