

## RECENT PUBLICATION

**Field Guide to the Birds of Japan.**—Wild Bird Society of Japan. 1982. Plastic-covered cloth binding. ¥ 2,900. [Available in U.S. at \$25–\$35.00 from various dealers.] This new guide in the “Collins” format with text facing plates covers an area of the world not adequately treated previously. The best color plates prior to this, although highly stylized, have been found in Kobayashi’s 3rd edition (1976); his Japanese text has proved daunting to most readers, however. The present volume, written by eight authors but illustrated by only one, Shinji Takano, is entirely in English (save Japanese language bird names, given parenthetically in Roman characters). To my surprise, Dr. N. Kuroda told me that there will be no Japanese language edition as “everyone” reads English.

The book has some 144 plates of 537 species, many of which are shown as breeding adults of both sexes, winter adults, juveniles (in one or more flight views); the plates use the Peterson system of indicating diagnostic features. The reddish/rufous tones are excessive in numerous plates of shorebirds, pipits, thrushes, *Emberizas* and carduelines, an over-riding production problem one hopes will be corrected in subsequent printings.

Overall, though, I found the plates excellent. They tend toward stylization, but only sporadically. Particularly good are the waterfowl, the juvenile *Tringa* and *Calidris* shorebirds (at last!), the shorebirds in general and notably the first color portrayals I have seen of Nordmann’s (Spotted) Greenshank and Asiatic Dowitcher; the rear flight views of curlews are outstanding. Many species of gulls rarely adequately illustrated heretofore grace these plates: Saunders’ (whose breeding range remains unknown, contra the map on p. 94), Slaty-backed (whose adult underwing pattern on p. 89 must be in error), Black-tailed, immature Red-legged Kittiwake, etc. The terns are good, including the first color depiction of a juvenile Aleutian of which I am aware; the plate of marsh terns should prove useful, but the failure to distinguish among Sooty, Bridled and Grey-backed in flight is an opportunity missed. The treatment of “*Procelsterna*” and “*Gygis*” as Blue and White noddies is refreshing. The wagtail and wheatear plates are superb, but those of the pipits only muddle an already confused area. Thrush (sensu lato) plates are likewise excellent except where too red; exceedingly useful are the multiple comparisons among Sooty, Brown and Grey-spotted flycatchers, including arresting side-by-side, on-the-wire portraits. Other innovative and practical head-on arrays are done for swallows, tits, thrushes and buntings. Flight views of carduelines reflect how they are often seen; the comparisons of Common and Pallas’ reed buntings have been needed for some time, and the pictures are large enough to show crucial details (covert colors, etc.). On the other hand, the Common Rosefinch is almost indistinguishable from other species of *Carpodacus*.

Much unmentioned information is tucked away on the plates (good depiction of immature Whiskered Auklet; *spodocephala* Black-faced Buntings pose a trap for seekers of Alaskan Grey Buntings; Red-throated Pipits are highly variable in spring plumage [but don’t come in color “phrases”]; the throat of female Siberian Ruby-throats is sometimes clear, sometimes reddish). On the other hand, there are also some errors (e.g., spring Long-toed Stints have neat, clean, Pectoral-like breast bands and thus are not so unlike Least, contra text and plate which do mention the double supercilary; Western Sandpipers in full winter plumage do not retain rufous coverts; juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpipers aren’t obviously streaked on their necks

and throats; the skua of Japanese waters is *maccormicki*, but that illustrated is up for grabs as to species and age-class; the “Mew Gull” shown is equally equivocal, but should be *kamtschatschensis*, whose plumages have never been adequately depicted and which is regarded by some as a good species). Some potentially confusing birds that are rarely recognized as such by field guides are here also ignored, e.g., female Falcatid Teals and female Eurasian Wigeons, immature Short-tailed and Black-footed albatrosses. Vocalizations are neglected, a serious error in a field guide.

The maps that show the ranges for 497 species are generally legible and their color-coding for seasonal status is adequate. They contain a few errors (e.g., Eurasian Oystercatcher resident in the Aleutians!), and are of widely differing coverage, hence scale. Shifting perspective from map to map is annoying, and it is frustrating to find information one is seeking, about say, the Siberian breeding range of a Japanese migrant, abruptly cut off. The maps nonetheless reveal some curious distributions and unexpected occurrences: why, with its tiny, tripartite, disjoint breeding range well to the west and south of the Aleutians, is Middendorf’s Grasshopper Warbler the *Locustella* of Alaska (and does it occur in Western Europe)? With essentially similar breeding and wintering ranges, why is Eye-browed Thrush regular in the Western Aleutians, while Siberian Thrush remains unrecorded? Why has Yellow-browed Bunting, with a likely relict breeding range and small population, straggled to the British Isles, while many other *Emberizas*—highly migratory, with huge breeding ranges and probably large populations—never have?

While I have viewed this field guide from the perspective of a North American user (never having been to Japan), I can easily see that it functions well and I would be delighted to have its equal for other avifaunas. It has a Peterson-style check-list in front, and concludes with an 11-page, photo-illustrated Baedeker for 18 birding sites. Indexes of Japanese, English, and scientific names are given. Also included are two color plates of introduced species, and the book is well up to date on inclusion of recent important records, as well as of new species, including the striking Okinawa Rail, only described in 1981. It does suffer from one defect that plagues all Collins-style field guides: inadequate room for text. One has only to peruse almost any identification or similar-species account to confirm this deficiency. The solution has always been at hand, but rarely adopted: bunch all the plates together and retain a Peterson-style text.

Finally, this book has a few odd taxonomic features such as its placement of larids between tubenoses and herons, and of raptors after shorebirds—an allegedly “functional” clustering of birds by habitat that frustrates the very purpose of systematics’ consistency. Then too, scientific names seem eclectic, following neither Vaurie nor Voous nor the AOU: *Actitis* is used, as is *Crocethia*; Caspian Plover (*asiaticus*) is considered conspecific with Oriental (*veredus*) despite compelling evidence discussed by Vaurie that the two aren’t even very closely related. Most surprising of all, Japanese Quail is here still treated conspecifically with Common Quail, despite striking vocal differences and sympatry in Mongolia. Nonetheless, this splendid new volume illustrates well many species heretofore unavailable in field-guide format, and will be the sine qua non of the Alaskan field workers. The Japanese Wild Bird Society deserves congratulations for a job well done.—P. A. Buckley.