

BIRDERS' BOOKSHELF

A Guide to Bird Finding in New Jersey
William J. Boyle, Jr. 1986. Rutgers University Press. 512 + xvii pp., 10 line drawings, 77 maps. Flexible-bound. \$19.95.

If birder turnout is any measure of the vitality of Bill Boyle's book, New Jersey's bird-sites system is anything but languishing.

In today's New Jersey most see technological decay, murky large randomly placed shopping malls, and a glaring patchwork of vanquished countryside; Boyle, however, deftly leads us meandering cross-state from one fine site to another so that we are doubly shocked to have seen so much beauty and so many birds.

The voice toward which *A Guide to Bird Finding in New Jersey* aspires and achieves comes to us as a gift from this big-league birder whose intelligence and energy promises to reward us for years to come.

It's good; it's really good. It serves as the command center for those active field birders in the "Garden State." It provides information on when and where to bird featuring a star-studded cast of migrating, nesting, wintering, common, rare, life, lost, shy, gregarious, gaudy, drab, noisy, exhausted, frenetic, diligent, nervy, hungry, ventriloquial, documented, lyrical, hostile, acquisitive, native, exotic, sleek, glistening, scruffy, bush-filling, sky-bound birds.

It carries the twin themes of travel and territory and strikes a pleasant balance between them. It is written with a conversational easiness and moves right along. Statistics are only loosely integrated into the text and the overall treatment is thrifty, controlled, and precise—a marvel of sure-handed research.

Boyle has won our admiration for his accuracy and meticulous care to details for we've used his book many times in planning Birdathon strategies, Big Days, and just great birding trips and have NEVER been disappointed.

Clearly the text and maps were done

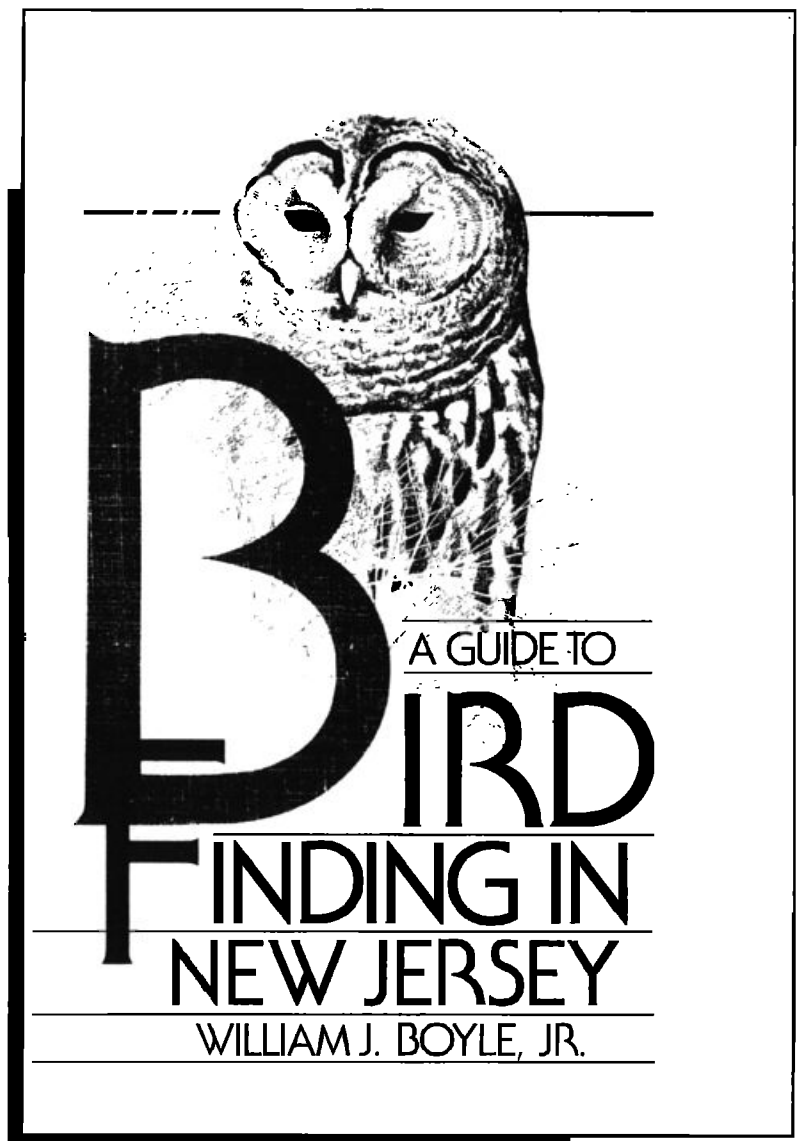
with careful attention to all details. In cases where, for instance, "the path around the pond at the family camping area is the best spot in the park (Allaire State Park, page 287) for Prothonotary Warbler," but that pond is not one of several shown on the accompanying map (page 281), the text is sufficiently clear so that this will not be a problem. Because there almost always must be some lack of exact correspondence between text and maps in a book of this scope, awareness of same will avoid confusion.

Two very small updates: the Tuckerton Road, though deeply potholed is passable without four-wheel

drive and well worth the effort but heed the warnings about tides on page 372; and the Longport Sod Banks are losing out to what some call "progress." The adjacent highway and bridge to the west on Route 152 (see map, page 398) are undergoing major reconstruction and expansion. It remains to be seen what will be left for birding.

This book is a happy adjunct to binoculars, scopes, and field guides for the birder in New Jersey.

Congratulations to our very accomplished co-regional editor of the Hudson-Delaware Region for a virtuoso accomplishment. —Susan Roney Drennan and Paul R. Meyer.



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Wisconsin Birds: a Seasonal and Geographical Guide

by Stanley A. Temple and John R. Cary,
available from: *The University of Wisconsin Press, 114 N. Murray St., Madison, WI 53715* Price: \$27.50 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

THIS BOOK PRESENTS THE DATA COMPILED from the weekly bird observations of 431 members of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology during the five-year period 1982-1986. This information is given solely in the form of relative abundance and seasonal abundance graphs and regional range maps for the 265 more common species found in the state. There is *no* text in *Wisconsin Birds: a Seasonal and Geographical Guide* save for a brief introduction, methods section, and description of the Wisconsin Checklist Project.

The book attempts to answer such questions as what are the chances of finding a particular species in Wisconsin and when and where is a given species most likely to be observed. The graphs and range maps give the reader a general overview of the status and distribution of the species in the state, but do *not* provide information on habitat requirements, historical changes in range or abundance, early or late arrival and departure dates, aseasonal and vagrant records, and high or low counts of individuals. An additional section treats 98 rarer species by simply listing the county and month in which each of the observations were made.

There are a number of biases and other limitations associated with the type of data and format used in *Wisconsin Birds*. The data are compiled only from the weekly checklists submitted by the participants, not on actual counts for each species. Biases have likely resulted from the varying degree of coverage and observer abilities in different regions of the state and from the data being skewed toward more conspicuous, backyard, feeder, and roadside species. Many migrants are shown as being more numerous in spring than in fall due to their increased detectability at that season, not because they are more abundant. Locally-occurring species have relatively low abundance values even if they are fairly common where they occur since few observers report them.

According to the authors, the relative abundance graphs "show [the] average probability of finding a bird of a given species in Wisconsin during the year" based on a scale from 0 to 100%; "the higher the value on the bar graph, the more common the bird is and the more likely you are to see it." However, the biases mentioned above result in many implausible results. For example, Ruffed Grouse and Sandhill Crane are denoted as having a relative abundance of 70 and 75% respectively, but Least Sandpiper only gets a 35% rating! Does the average birder really only have a 25% chance of seeing a Semipalmated Sandpiper in Wisconsin during a given year? The migrant and locally breeding Pine Warbler is shown as having only a 25% value. The even more local, but fairly common, nesting Connecticut Warbler receives only a 20% notation.

The range maps divide the state into 43 regions with different shading patterns used to denote varying abundances between each. However, these abundance values differ from map to map. And for some species there is little difference in the regional reporting frequencies, while in others the differences are quite significant. These maps are best used to see what the relative abundance of a given species is in different sections of Wisconsin, not to compare abundances of different species.

In all, *Wisconsin Birds: a Seasonal and Geographical Guide* provides a valuable *general* overview of the seasonal status and distribution of the more regular occurring species in the state. However, in addition to lacking many of the details needed to gain a more complete understanding of bird distribution in a given region, the type of information on which this book is based, as well as the format in which the data are presented, are fraught with biases and limitations. —Paul Lehman.



The Birds of Mexico City Richard G. Wilson and Hector Ceballos-Lascurain. 1986. BBC Printing & Graphics Ltd. 86 pp., several black-and-white photos and line illustrations. Paperbound \$9.00 + \$3.00 handling. Available by money order from publisher: 2289 Fairview Street, Unit 425, Burlington, Ontario, Canada L7R 2E3.

Most ornithologists and birders visiting or living in Mexico tend, perhaps not surprisingly, to concentrate their efforts in the glamorous tropical forests of the south or in the Pacific Slope centers of endemism. Consequently, the interior highlands and plateau of northern and central Mexico have all-too-often been neglected. *Birds of Mexico City*, an annotated checklist of the birds of Mexico's Distrito Federal (a political entity with similar status to Washington, D.C.) helps fill a longstanding void in our knowledge of the status and distribution of Mexican birds.

The authors are long-term residents of Mexico City and know their area well. Many years of field work have been combined with critical and extensive literature and museum searches and correspondence with other ornithologists. The main part of the text is a very readable, concise and well-documented account which details the status (the term "rather rare" is used instead of the more usual "uncommon") and distribution of the approximately 300 species reliably recorded in the Distrito Federal. Appendix A lists birds of uncertain occurrence; some of these records, as the authors state, are probably correct but could not be verified. An annotated list of birds known from immediately adjacent areas comprises Appendix B and helps put the Distrito Federal avifauna in context.

Researching the information was no small task: as stated in the introduction: "The 6th Edition of the A.O.U. Checklist of North American Birds may well contain more errors concerning the Federal District than any other single area in North America". Unravelling the confusion caused by inexact specimen labels and few peoples' working knowledge of the region's biogeography has been done well. The authors'

evaluations are commendably conservative in an age when much published "information" is simply assumed to be correct or is not properly checked. At the same time, their extensive use of well-documented sight records is a breath of fresh air.

Long-term studies of areas are true rarities anywhere in Latin America, and the data on migration timings alone make the book invaluable to students of Mexican birds. However, as one thumbs through the main list many other interesting facts come to light: that Baird's Sandpiper is the commonest migrant shorebird in the Distrito Federal (c.f. A.O.U. 1983), that many eastern wood warblers—Chestnut-sided, Worm-eating, Mourning and Canada among them—occur as rare migrants so far west, that many "resident" species engage in seasonal and/or altitudinal movements, and that one may find such sought-after Mexican endemics as Long-tailed Wood-Partridge and Aztec Thrush so close to the world's most populous city.

Appendix C, a bird-finding guide to the Distrito Federal, is an important addition and makes the book invaluable to birders as well as ornithologists. Clear directions and maps are given for places within an easy day's drive of downtown Mexico City as well as for good sites within the city itself. One may not realize that the senior author spent several years pin-pointing reliable sites for very local and threatened species such as Black-poll'd Yellowthroat and Sierra Madre Sparrow, and that the site given for the latter species is the only place in the world where one can readily find it! I noted a couple of slips in Appendix C: to get to Almoloya del Rio one must pass under (not over) the bridge and then loop up (not down) on to the other highway, and Spot-breasted Warbler was not changed to Crescent-chested Warbler. But these are minor points in an otherwise good work.

A bibliography and index complete *Birds of Mexico City* which is produced in the form of a handy 5.5 x 8.5" booklet. As with all distributional works, new information appeared soon after its publication but, before it was published we didn't know what was known or unknown! All in all, *Birds of Mexico City* should find a well-earned place on the bookshelves of both ornithologists and birders who share an interest in Mexican birds.—Steve N. G. Howell

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Birds of the Texas Coastal Bend: Abundance and Distribution

by John H. Rappole and Gene W. Blacklock, published (1985) by Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX.

SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE VERY popular Upper Texas Coast to the northeast and the Lower Rio Grande Valley to the south, the Texas Coastal Bend is a region largely bypassed by many birders. This nine-county area does contain such well-known birding localities as Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Rockport, and Corpus Christi, but much of the

remainder of the area remains unexplored by most observers. The Texas Coastal Bend supports a very high diversity of birds, approximately 500 species have been recorded there, due to its coastal location and the fact that it straddles the southern boundary of both the humid eastern temperate zone and the dry western temperate zone as well as the northern boundary of the subtropics. While many trans-Gulf land-bird migrants pass farther to the east and thus miss this area under most weather conditions, many others are circum-Gulf migrants, following the shore of the western Gulf of Mexico, and occur in large numbers in the Coastal Bend. Raptors and many species of waterbirds are especially abundant in this region. And a combination of the fairly diverse habitat types, coastal location, and relatively mild winter climate has resulted in a particularly rich assemblage of wintering species. The Corpus Christi Christmas Bird Count has recorded over 200 species on more than one occasion.

Birds of the Texas Coastal Bend: Abundance and Distribution, by John H. Rappole and Gene W. Blacklock, describes the avifauna of this area through relatively brief species accounts for all bird species known to have occurred in the region, as well as by the presentation of seasonal bar graphs for most of these species. This book also contains good introductory sections on the geography, migration and seasonal changes, and habitats (complete with excellent color photographs) of the Coastal Bend.

The species accounts make up the main body of the text. Overall, most of these accounts are rather brief. And while they do give the reader a good

general idea of the status and distribution of the species in the region, they often leave out valuable information, some of which leads to a certain degree of frustration for the reader. Actual species counts and aseasonal records are essentially ignored. Many records of casual and accidental species are not accompanied by specific date and/or locality information, details which many readers would find valuable, and which would have taken little extra space to include. For example, a disturbing number of accounts simply include such statements as "two confirmed records" or "there is one sight record." Under the Manx Shearwater account it is most interesting to read that an individual found on the beach on Padre Island had been banded in Scotland on 30 August 1973—but that account does not include the date the Padre Island specimen was found! Several hypothetical records lack details that might shed some additional light. For example, could not the Emperor Goose sighting just be a misidentified, locally numerous blue-morph Snow Goose? Is the Spotted Redshank record that of a controversial bird believed by some to have been a yellowlegs? The single sight record of Black Swift contains no date information; could it possibly have involved a White-collared Swift, especially if it had come from the winter season?

There are also a number of inconsistencies in the treatment of many species. For example, why are most hypothetical species included in the bar graphs while thirteen others are left off? A helpful appendix lists specimen or photographic documentation confirming the presence of those species "for which there are fewer than five confirmed records for the Coastal Bend." However, this list contains such seemingly regular-occurring species as American Bittern, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Wood Duck, Canvasback, Semipalmated Plover, Whimbrel, Eastern Screech-Owl, . . . and the list goes on.

All in all, *Birds of the Texas Coastal Bend: Abundance and Distribution* provides a good general overview to the habitats and birds in this biologically rich area. A relatively small amount of additional information provided in the species accounts would have resulted in a significantly more thorough treatment of the status and distribution of many of these species. —Paul Lehman.

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John James Audubon By John Burroughs. 1902. Reprinted (1987) by The Overlook Press, Lewis Hollow Road, Woodstock, NY 12498. Hardbound \$16.95.

In his own lifetime, Audubon achieved celebrity status. His name was known in the capitals of the Western World, and he was dined by President Andrew Jackson. A mere two decades after his death at least four biographies had been published, and, in 1897, the most complete collection of his writings was edited (heavily) and printed by his granddaughter Maria. Ever since, biographers have had to grapple with the peculiar mixture of fact and fancy surrounding the details of Audubon's life and work, so it is instructive to see how no less a pioneer naturalist than John Burroughs approached the subject more than eighty years ago.

Burroughs' *John James Audubon*, recently reissued, is a straightforward recounting of Audubon's history. It paints a reverent portrait of the "American Woodsman" and contains many of the myths that modern biographers, notably Harwood and Durant, have only recently debunked: that he studied with the classical French painter David, for example, or that he was a totally inept businessman. On the other hand, Burroughs' underlying interpretation of Audubon's genius—that his love of birds and artistic talents were inherent and would inevitably triumph—prevails even today.

Moreover, Burroughs reserves a critical eye for Audubon's excesses in manners, writing, and even art. Most interesting is his assessment of Audubon's crowning work, *The Birds of America*. "His bird pictures reflect his own temperament, not to say his nationality," he writes. "The birds are very demonstrative, even theatrical and melodramatic at times. In some cases this is all right, in others it is all wrong." On balance, Burroughs is clearly aware of the *Birds of America's* place in history. Likewise, today Audubon's achievements—the life-like quality of his drawings and the extraordinary human effort that produced them—are universally recognized, even if the individual merits of his birds are still hotly debated.

Burroughs' biography of Audubon is very readable. The publishers have performed a valuable service by making a work of this stature accessible to a wider public. They have erred, however, by not providing adequate background material on either Burroughs or Audubon; the latter might help the uninformed reader begin to separate truth from fiction in Audubon's life. There is a fine but all-too-brief foreword by Dean Amadon, curator emeritus at the American Museum of Natural History. The book has been issued in a handy size and is well printed, with a handsome jacket.—**Fredrick Baumgarten.**

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