

Belgium, Belorussia, England, Finland, Germany, Norway, Russia and Sweden] and recovered south of the Sahara [in Burkino Faso, Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa, Zaire, Zambia and Zimbabwe] and one banded in Kenya and recovered in Russia are tabulated and mapped. By the end of 1994, about 1,030,000 House Martins had been banded in Europe and about 300 in Africa. Only one of 248,084 House Martins banded in England to date has been recovered south of the Sahara, whereas 33 sub-Saharan recoveries have been recorded from 158,036 European Swifts banded in England.) MKM

**Sunbird recaptures and seasonal movements at Lydenburg, Mpumalanga Province.** D. H. de Swardt and S. Schoeman. 1997. *Safring News* 26:13-15. Natl. Mus., Box 266, Bloemfontein,

South Africa (Between 1988 and 1997, 565 bird of four sunbird species were captured and banded in the Lydenburg area. Of 14 recaptures of Malachite Sunbirds, only one had moved, apparently in response to a veld fire. Two of six Black Sunbird recaptures showed seasonal movements. Similarly, only one recaptured Doublecollared Sunbird to date represented a seasonal movement. Longevity records attained so far are 62 months for Malachite Sunbirds and 61 months for Black Sunbirds.) MKM

**Note:** Thanks to Susan Hannon and Michael D. Samuel for sending reprints of papers abstracted in this issue.

**MKM** = Martin K. McNicholl

## Books

**COWBIRDS AND OTHER BROOD PARASITES.** Catherine P. Ortega. 1998. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. xx + 372 pp. \$65.00 U.S.

As suggested by the title, **Cowbirds and other brood parasites** is essentially two books in one. It is primarily a very thorough update of Herbert Friedmann's classic **The cowbirds [:] a study in the biology of social parasitism**, published in 1929, plus a review of brood parasitism in other birds. Ortega has combined her own research with the literature to provide comprehensive reviews of what is known to date on cowbird biology (including that of non-parasitic cowbirds), the biology of avian brood parasitism generally, and the techniques used by other bird species to avoid having brood parasites deposit eggs into their nests and/or to avoid incubating any such eggs. Tables throughout the text and detailed appendices at the end of the book summarize considerable background data without cluttering the text.

The first three chapters constitute a review of brood parasitism generally, including a taxonomic review of the avian families that exhibit brood parasitism (covering nonobligate parasites of conspecifics, nonobligate parasites of other species and obligate parasites), effects of brood parasitism on the host species, defense mechanisms shown by potential hosts (ranging from outright rejection of parasite

eggs to various ways of reducing access by the female parasite to the nests), and a thorough review of the various theories as to how brood parasitism may have evolved in one or more of the avian families that exhibit it. Some grebe and larid species could be added to her table of species reported as exhibiting nonobligate interspecific parasitism (p. 2), but are presumably excluded on the basis of the eggs having arrived by other means, such as being carried to the nests as food (p.3). I would have added the possibility that on some substrates, some eggs may have rolled from one nest into another, especially when adults left nests suddenly, as when disturbed. Ortega's reviews are generally comprehensive, presenting an array of views. Unfortunately, however, her text appears to have been finished before Alexander F. Skutch published his view that brood parasitism in cowbirds evolved "from the penchant of certain birds to breed in nests more elaborate than they could make" (Skutch 1996:172), a view that differs from other published theories on the evolution of brood parasitism.

The next five chapters constitute life history accounts of the six cowbird species. Chapter 4 covers the non-parasitic Bay-winged Cowbird and its frequent parasite, the Screaming Cowbird, with emphasis on recent research by Rosendo Fraga and Paul Mason. The relatively little-studied Giant

Cowbird is covered in Chapter 5. The two traditionally North American species, the Bronzed and Brown-headed cowbirds are covered in the next two chapters, with that on the Brown-headed covering more than 70 pages. The Shiny Cowbird, recently expanding its range from South America through various Caribbean islands into North America, is discussed in Chapter 8. Topics within these species accounts vary, but include distribution (including range expansions), subspecies (if any), courtship, social system, nesting data (including nest-site if any), clutch size, host species, host-parasite interactions, plumages, molts, movements, development and behavior of young, effects of parasitism on hosts and numerous other features of natural history. Ortega appears to have covered the literature thoroughly, and presents good summaries of what is known and what still needs to be studied in each species.

In the final chapter, Ortega discusses population trends in cowbirds, the factor(s) potentially responsible for these trends, and the strengths and weaknesses of the data underlying reported effects of cowbirds on the populations of other birds. Her discussion includes the effectiveness of different "management" techniques and the information required to measure the need for and influence of management programs. Topics covered include whether or not increased "edge" habitat increases rate of cowbird parasitism, effects of extensions of cowbird ranges into ranges of species not adapted to avoiding predation, whether removing eggs from nests results in more laying by the cowbirds and whether or not cowbird populations have stabilized.

The book ends with five appendices, four pages of footnotes to the nine chapters, a list of references, an index and a short biographical blurb about the author. The appendices consist of rates of parasitism by Shiny (Appendix A) and Brown-headed (C) cowbirds on some of their hosts, lists of "known victims" of Brown-headed (Appendix B) and Shiny (E) cowbirds, and the number of eggs of Brown-headed Cowbird that have been found in nests of various host species (Appendix D). After publishing his 1929 book, Friedmann published periodic updates on known hosts of each cowbird species, and the last of these updates (Friedmann and Kiff 1985) is the main source for Ortega's two

host lists. However, Ortega has further updated these, adding several species to the list of species known to have been parasitized by Shiny Cowbirds. These lists appear to be thorough updates. I was able to find a record of only one species not listed: a single record of one Varied Thrush nest (of 78 nest records) parasitized in British Columbia (Campbell et al. 1997). Symbols in the host lists indicate which species are known to have fledged cowbirds and which species are known to reject cowbird eggs. The other appendices are referenced thoroughly, and the list of literature shows that Ortega has not relied only on books and papers in major journals, but has also taken the time to seek out original sources in numerous regional journals.

Banders will find plenty of interest in this book. Banding and other individual markings obviously helped answer several life history questions about cowbirds and provided information on cowbird movements and longevity. For example, banding of Bay-winged Cowbirds showed that only a small proportion of males help females build nests, helped determine how far this species travels to gather nesting material, demonstrated cooperative breeders in this species, and documented its relatively sedentary nature (pp. 73, 79). Color-banding confirmed earlier suspicions that Screaming Cowbirds are primarily monogamous and demonstrated their strong site attachment with overlapping home ranges (pp. 83-85). Banding of Brown-headed Cowbirds wintering in Texas showed that they come from breeding populations from at least 21 U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, that individuals may winter in different areas from one winter to another and that individuals may move from one location to another within a given winter (p. 163 and Table 7.5, p. 164). Band recoveries have also shown that birds wintering in California travel both altitudinally and north to Oregon, Washington and British Columbia (p. 163) and that Brown-headed Cowbirds show greater site tenacity to breeding than to wintering grounds (p. 165). Radio-telemetry has documented movements, activities and mating system details of Brown-headed Cowbirds, including distances between breeding and foraging sites and between foraging and roosting sites (pp. 148-149, 155). Banding and radio-telemetry have been used to document movements, home range size and low

site tenacity of Shiny Cowbirds (pp. 216-217). Observations of banded Shiny Cowbird females indicate that they monitor renesting attempts of hosts (p. 229). Ortega uses trapping results among other methods to show geographical and seasonal variation in sex ratios of Brown-headed Cowbirds (Table 7.2). In addition, plumages and molts are described for each species and age-determination features of Brown-headed Cowbirds are outlined (p. 139). Traps are described briefly in the management chapter (pp. 271-272).

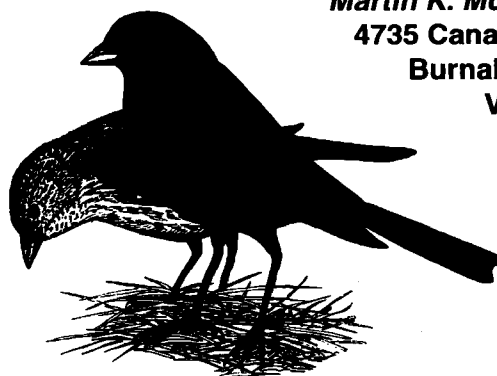
Errors in this book appear to be restricted to slight grammatical flaws, a few incorrect spellings, one outdated place name and a few references cited in the text, but not listed in the reference list. Cited references that are not listed include Goeldi 1897 (p. 105), Peck 1974 (p. 304), Post 1981 (p. 237), Nolan 1960 (p. 295), and Griffith and Griffith 1993 (p. 272), while Johnston and Hagan 1992 (p. 250) and Hagan and Johnston 1993 (p. 272) are probably simply "typos" for Hagan and Johnston 1992 and Hudson 1974 (p. 95) is undoubtedly intended to refer to his 1874 paper, otherwise cited correctly. Proof-reading of Appendix C appears to have been more superficial than the rest of the book, as D. C. Hann and L. M. Terrill are spelled incorrectly Hahn and Terril respectively repeatedly throughout, although both are spelled correctly in the reference list. Traill's Flycatcher is also spelled incorrectly Traill's in a footnote to the same appendix (p. 305). British Guiana (p. 225) became Guyana two or three decades ago.

Ortega was stimulated by the plethora of recent research on cowbirds to write this book. She has provided an interesting and comprehensive update to Friedmann's pioneering volume. Anybody interested in the topic of brood parasitism in birds and/or in the life histories of any of the six cowbird species will find this book to be as thorough a reference source as can be provided in an area of active research. Those interested in a specific aspect of cowbird biology may also need to consult Skutch (1996), Morrison et al. (1999) and the journal literature for possible updates, but Ortega's book will serve as the main reference source on these interesting birds for years to come.

## LITERATURE CITED

- Campbell, R. W., N. K. Dawe, I. McTaggart-Cowan, J. M. Cooper, G. W. Kaiser, M. C. E. McNall and G. E. J. Smith. 1997. The birds of British Columbia. Vol. 3. Univ. British Columbia Press, Vancouver.
- Friedmann, H. and L. F. Kiff. 1985. The parasitic cowbirds and their hosts. *Proc. West. Found. Vert. Zool.* 2:225-302.
- Morrison, M. L., L. S. Hall, S. K. Robinson, S. I. Rothstein, D. C. Hahn and T. D. Rich. 1999. Research and management of the Brown-headed Cowbird in western landscapes. *Studies in Avian Biol.* No. 18.
- Skutch, A. F. 1996. Orioles, blackbirds, and their kin. A natural history. Univ. Arizona Press, Tucson.

**Martin K. McNicholl**  
4735 Canada Way  
Burnaby, B.C.  
V5G 1L3



**FINCHES AND SPARROWS**, paperback edition. Peter Clement. 1999. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 500 pp. \$29.95 U.S.

The title of this book, and the claim that it provides a "comprehensive identification guide to the 290 species of finches and sparrows throughout the world," made me optimistic that it could fill a useful niche in North American ornithology. Unfortunately, however, the book has an Old World focus. The "sparrows" described by the author all belong to the Passeridae, with no mention being made to the New World "sparrows" of the Emberizidae. Further, the coverage of the "true finches" (Fringillidae) is incomplete, as coverage is restricted to two of the three subfamilies (Fringillinae and Carduelinae), while the Hawaiian Honeycreepers (Drepanidinae) are excluded. The remaining coverage is devoted to the Estrildidae, a family that is not endemic to the Nearctic region, where it is represented by only a

few species, most occurring in Hawaii (see A.O.U. Checklist, 7th edition, 1998). In all, only about 6% of the described species naturally occur in the Americas, and of these, several are referred to by their unfamiliar Old World common names, e.g., Arctic Redpoll (Hoary Redpoll) and Two-barred Crossbill (White-winged Crossbill).

In some ways the book founders on its ambition. Part of the difficulty lies in the use of English names to cover such a disparate group of birds whose taxonomy is still in dispute. For example, "finch" has been applied to at least 11 different groups of birds of varying degrees of taxonomic affinity, while "sparrow" is similarly problematical (see Campbell and Lack. 1985. **A dictionary of birds**). The author is aware of the problem and does make an attempt to rationalize his approach. In the introduction, for example, he makes an effort to define what constitutes a "typical" finch. Later, in the Systematic Section, he makes reference to the recent developments in avian taxonomy, including DNA-DNA hybridization. Despite this awareness, Clement's final selection and arrangement of species is based on convenience of use rather than taxonomic exactness, an approach that I find unconvincing.

Taxonomic problems aside, I looked at the effectiveness of the book in meeting its avowed goals. The author claims that it is designed to act as both a field identification guide and as a reference work for species frequently seen in captivity. To achieve both purposes effectively in one volume, I suggest, is a formidable task. As a field guide, the book has merit. The illustrations, with their accompanying descriptions and range maps are clear and concise. But, in the field does one really need the more detailed descriptions that follow and occupy some 2/3 of the book's content? I suspect that despite its coverage of a diverse array of species that collectively occupy a huge geographic range, most observers when in the field will prefer to rely on the more sharply focussed regional field guides.

As a true "reference work," I think that the book is short on accuracy and substance. For example, there are inaccuracies pertaining to anatomical detail (pp. 7 and 14, where the ankle is incorrectly identified as the "knee" and the compound tarso-

metatarsus as the oft-misnamed "tarsus;" p. 483, where the crop is identified as a "thin-walled extension above the oesophagus" rather than as a specially adapted portion of the oesophagus). The claim (p. 13) that a "full glossary of terms" is provided is presumptuous. When checked, the glossary is restricted to two pages of arbitrarily selected terms that exclude many of the basic ornithological terms used in the text (e.g., hybrid, remex, and moult). The bibliography appears adequate but is composed largely of regional guides, notes, and checklists, has few references to the primary literature, and 1992 is the most recent year for citation. This last feature may reflect the dangers associated with producing a non-updated paperback edition of a work first published in 1993. Annoying errors are common throughout the Bibliography [e.g., Bates, G. L. (193)---; Sclater and Hudson (18881889)---] and the format is inconsistent (e.g., the publisher is omitted from many book citations and only the place of publication provided; elsewhere only the publisher, but no place, is provided). For a reference work, I expected more in terms of substance and quality.

Despite these criticisms, the book is attractive and easy to use. The layout is sensible. The 19-page introductory section provides comments on how to use the book, on taxonomy, and clues to identification. This is followed by 145 pages of colored plates, accompanying descriptions and range maps for each species. The largest section of the book (317 pages) provides detailed information on each species as follows: identification, description, geographical variation, voice, status, distribution, movements, measurements, and references. The final few pages contain the glossary, bibliography, and index.

The text is clean and easy to read, the plates are sharp and clear, and the stylized but consistent pose illustrated for each species, makes easy the identification of, and comparison between species. The accuracy of some plates, however, is questionable (e.g., American Goldfinch, *Carduelis tristis*: on plate 65b the median coverts of the female are too boldly depicted and the bill color is too pale; on 65c the overall impression should be more yellow and median coverts should show yellow; and on 65e the bill shape should be more

conical and distinct white streaking should be shown extending beyond the coverts on the narrow margins of the primaries). In general the color rendition is good, but I recall the Greenfinches, *Carduelis chloris*, I have seen in the field as being more brightly colored than shown. The consistent format by which each species is described, both opposite the plate and in the detailed descriptions that follow, makes the contents easy to grasp and digest. However, for those who might anticipate using the book to assist with ageing and sexing during banding, the information on plumages, molts, and morphology is not as extensive and consistent as provided in other works (e.g., Pyle et al. 1977. **Identification guide to North American birds**). North American readers may be bothered by the Old World method of numbering the primaries, and the plumage terminology that is at odds with what is now becoming commonplace in

the New World, but is the result of the unresolved debate on which system provides the most valid terminology. My paperback review copy was apparently sturdy, but I wonder how well it might stand up to heavy use in the field.

Overall this is an attractive book that may have a place in the library of those who enjoy collecting bird books and who work with birds in captivity. As a reference and working book, however, I feel that it has limited value, particularly to the North American field ornithologist. For the latter, I suggest that money could be better spent on works that are more directly appropriate to the region.

**Alex L. A. Middleton**  
Department of Zoology  
University of Guelph  
Guelph, Ont. N1G 2W1

