

British Trust for Ornithol., The Natl. Cent. for Ornithol., The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU, U.K. (Numbers of adult birds caught at over 120 "Constant Effort Sites" in Britain and Ireland during the 1997 breeding season were the lowest since monitoring began in 1983. A comparison between 1996 and 1997 at 82 sites indicated declines in adults of all but two of 24 species

monitored. On the other hand, 1997 saw increases in numbers of young of most species captured, with Great Tits and Bullfinches attaining record highs.)
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Note: Thanks to Kay Loughman for copies of the two *Science* notes abstracted in this compilation.

Books

COLLINS BIRD GUIDE. By Lars Svensson and Peter Grant. 1999. Illustrated by Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterstrom. Harper Collins, London, and Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 392 pp. 24.95 pounds Sterling.

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF EUROPE. Authors, illustrators and publishers as above. 392 pp. 29.95 pounds Sterling.

Over the last 50 years there have been published numerous field guides to the birds of Britain and the rest of Europe. For such an over-served geographical area, one might reasonably ask, "why would anybody bother to write (and illustrate) yet another one?" This question is answered very effectively by Svensson *et al.*: because you can do it so much better than anybody else. Bird books, like everything else, tend to be good, bad, or indifferent. The "Collins guide" is none of the above. Simply, it is superb.

We are in fact looking at two separate editions of one work; the original "bird guide," 8 x 5.5 in (20.3 x 14 cm), weighing about one pound 10 ounces (about 737 g), and the coffee table "birds of Europe," 12.5 x 9 in (31.8 x 22.9 cm) and almost three times as heavy. Basically, these are identical except that the bigger format of the "birds of Europe" allows for the illustrations to be much larger and consequently more clear.

Notwithstanding the titles, the books cover more than Europe, since all of northern Africa, the Levant, and Turkey are included; Europe is defined as east to the Urals and south to the Caucasus. As a result, many more species are included than in, for example, the classical Peterson *et al.* "Field

guide to the birds of Britain and Europe," published almost half a century ago. This is extremely useful, not merely because countries like Morocco, Israel, and Turkey are visited frequently now by bird-watchers, but also because many of the breeding species of these peripheral regions show up in western Europe as vagrants.

The meat of the books start with a useful introduction which in addition to explaining the layout and conventions of the text, has informative sections on plumages and the effects of viewing conditions on observation. This could with profit be read by all bird-watchers in Europe or elsewhere. The bulk of the books consist of individual species' accounts and accompanying illustrations, and it is here that the true worth of the work emerges.

Each account of a family or group of birds starts off with some general comments, giving background information and the typical characteristics of the family or genus; in some cases detailed and useful (I consistently repeat the word "useful" in this review, but it is always the most appropriate word) analyses of genera or groups with emphasis on features which aid field identification, are given. The books use the "side-by-side" format; that is, the illustrations and the text for each species sit adjacent to each other, rather than the system used in the early Peterson guides in which all the species were illustrated on one page and one had to search elsewhere for the text. The illustrations are, in a word, magnificent, enormously detailed (e.g., there are no fewer than 15 separate flight pictures of Honey Buzzard, showing all the variations of color phases, ages, and flight attitudes) and very accurate. Despite having two artists, a remarkable uniformity of style has been

achieved, except for two plates of North American vagrants by a third artist whose style is less precise. Several features make the illustrations especially useful. In many cases a figure for confusing similar species is added to a plate for comparison. Building on Peterson's technique of pointing out identification criteria with arrows, the authors have gone one step further by adding short notes to the arrows to explain the precise identification feature to be looked for. Since the authors and artists themselves are recognized widely in the European birding community as leading-edge exponents of the finer points of field identification, often the features emphasized are not found in other guides, such as the primary extensions in different related species of warbler. One aesthetically pleasing feature of the illustrations is the occasional use of background of such things as typical habits, always unobtrusively so as not to take away from the main point of the plate. I especially liked the little vignette of Ivory Gulls descending on to a devastated seal carcass as in the background a well-fed Polar Bear wanders off for a snooze, and the tower of Seville Cathedral as a background for Lesser Kestrels.

Is it possible to criticize these books? Yes, obviously, since nothing is perfect. The English nomenclature is a little weird. Great Northern Loon is an uneasy hybrid of British and North American usage, and I had to admit that I had never heard of Pallas's Gull until I realized that it was Great Black-headed Gull. The one area that could be improved greatly is the range maps. In the "bird guide," these are of necessity small and rather difficult to see in detail. In the "birds of Europe," they are simply reprinted in the same size, despite having plenty of adjacent empty space. Furthermore, all the maps cover the entire geographical area. This is fine for species of wide distribution, but if we take a species like Ruppell's Warbler, breeding only around the Aegean, is there any point in also including Iceland on the map? There are cheap charter flights from London to the island of Rhodes; if I take a week's package holiday to Rhodes, am I likely to see Ruppell's Warbler? Even with a magnifying glass, I can not tell. For such restricted species, more detailed maps of their actual ranges would be much more informative.

Nevertheless, given the glorious nature of both versions of this book, criticism seems churlish. Should you buy one or the other? Absolutely yes. If you are intending to visit Europe, get the "bird guide;" if not, the "birds of Europe;" or, better still, indulge yourself and get both. You won't begrudge the money.

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EARLY SOUTHWEST ORNITHOLOGISTS, 1528-1900. By Dan L. Fischer. 2001. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. xxii + 273 pp. \$45.00

In this well-researched volume, Dan L. Fischer presents a fascinating history of ornithological exploration of the southwestern U.S.A. and to a lesser extent adjacent portions of northern Mexico. Although the title reflects both the focal era and focal area covered by the narrative, much of the text encompasses broader areas and more recent times, as many of the naturalists and ornithologists discussed lived to well into the twentieth century and came from other parts of North America or Europe. The book starts with ornithological notes recorded by a few early explorers and continues through seven chapters on ornithological activities conducted during various stages of European settlement, exploration, and military endeavors in the region. Much of the narrative consists of mini-biographies of more than 100 contributors to "southwestern" ornithology, ranging from those who collected one or more species new to science on brief visits to others who resided for longer periods in one or more location(s) and reported extensively on the avifauna of particular areas or habitats and/or on the behavior and life histories of species little known previously. A useful appendix lists the first known observers and collectors of numerous species under their current names as well as the original describer of the species, when it was described, and earlier names used for the species in the southwestern U.S.

On the whole, I found the book both informative and interesting, although the text occasionally

strays on to tangents fairly far removed from the main topic under discussion. A few details are repeated several times as they relate to various explorers, most notably the discovery and partial description of White-throated Swifts at a specific location (El Morrow) in California by different explorers and the ensuing confusion/controversy over who should be given credit for its discovery. The reference list is reasonably thorough and will give readers interested in pursuing further details plenty of material to explore. However, a few omissions are unfortunate and the list is not as extensive a bibliography as indicated on the book jacket. For example, the two biographies and one tribute cited for Major Allan Brooks (spelled correctly in the main text, but incorrectly as Allen on p. xiii) are all interesting and informative, but not as thorough as a full-length book written about him and his work (Laing 1979). More importantly, no biography is cited for Henry P. Atwater, who lived in Texas during part of the period, although Oberholser (1932) published one shortly after his death and Casto (1983) discussed his influence on early conservation efforts in that state. Biographical references are also lacking for the contributions of Frank B. Armstrong, H. B. Butcher, George Henry Ragsdale, and George B. Sennett, although Casto (1980, 1981, 1994, 2000) has written more detailed accounts on the efforts of these men and several other early contributors to Texas ornithology additional to those mentioned by Fischer. Reference to Casto's (1997) paper on the birds collected by Heermann in the San Antonio area would also have added to the paragraph on that explorer's final home. Readers wishing more details of the early visit by Thomas Nuttall and J. K. Townsend to the northwestern U.S. than offered in the brief mention on pages 19-20 would also have benefitted from a reference to the account by Jobanek and Marshall (1992).

Since organized banding had not begun by the end of the era covered by most of the book, its main direct interest to banders is in its early descriptions of some of the species they band and the appendix listing the first descriptions of many species. However, the author (p. 201) does mention the role of "bird netting and banding" in reducing the need to "secure" specimens to identify birds, and *NABB* readers will be pleased to note several prominent banders in Fischer's list of acknowledgments.

In short, Fischer has provided an interesting, lively account of ornithological endeavors of numerous explorers, military naturalists, and early settlers in a major portion of North America. It provides an important contribution to our understanding of the history of ornithology on this continent.

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Turkey Vulture
 by George West