

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Birds of the Lower Colorado River Valley.** 1991. Kenneth V. Rosenberg, Robert D. Ohmart, William C. Hunter, and Bertin W. Anderson. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. 416 pp., 33 black and white figures and 6 tables. Price: \$40.00 clothbound.

The Colorado River, running from its sources in the Rocky Mountain areas of Wyoming and Colorado to its mouth at the head of the Gulf of California, is the only large body of water passing through the arid areas of southern Nevada, western Arizona, and southeastern California. The flow of this once mighty river is now controlled and managed for human benefit. There is a series of dams, and most if not all of the water is diverted before it reaches the delta. This river has always supported a rich variety of life, but the major changes recently imposed by man have affected, and still are affecting, that life. *Birds of the Lower Colorado River Valley* covers the birdlife along that portion of the river running from Davis Dam in southern Nevada to the Mexican boundary, summarizing the past and present status of the more than 400 species reported from this stretch of the river.

All four of the authors were part of a research team conducting a 12-year study of plant-animal-habitat relationships along the lower Colorado River, so know the current status and distribution of the birds in the area. They had access to Gale Monson's unpublished field notes gathered during his 16-year tenure along the Colorado River starting in 1942, and took full advantage of them to determine recent changes in status and distribution. In addition they relied on articles and notes in various scientific journals and reports to determine the historic status of many species and to assure the inclusion of all records from the region.

The authors followed the format used in most regional bird books, with the individual species accounts taking up most of the pages. However, the introductory chapters are lengthier than those found in most similar books, taking up more than 100 pages. The introduction presents a brief but clear picture of the Colorado River drainage basin and its dominant vegetation, pointing out the influence this river has had on the area around it, and the influence man has had upon it.

One of the first chapters outlines the history of human use along the river's course, and the resultant changes in the vegetation and birdlife. Another chapter summarizes the authors' research, listing the various habitats to be found along the river, along with the bird species utilizing them during the various seasons of the year. This is followed by a chapter containing information on types of conservation felt to be necessary to reverse the spiral of habitat degradation in this region.

One chapter is devoted to patterns of bird distribution, giving a general overview of those species considered permanent residents, summer and winter visitors, and those species regularly migrating along the river and straying into the area. A most useful feature in this chapter is a series of graphs depicting migration periods for some of the commoner water and landbird migrants regularly using the Lower Colorado River as a flyway.

An interesting addition to the book is a chapter on finding birds in the Lower Colorado River Valley that will be useful to birders and ornithologists alike visiting the area. This chapter is accompanied by detailed maps covering the ten most productive areas, along with information about the birds to be found in each of these areas. A very useful table accompanying this chapter lists avian activities among the resident and migrant species on an almost weekly basis through the year, allowing the reader to determine quickly what to expect at any time of the year.

The heart of this book, the species accounts, covers the status and habitat preference of each of the 400 species known to occur along the Lower Colorado

River, along with information on their breeding and food habits where appropriate, and additional comments about each species where informative. Hypothetical species are listed in a separate appendix, which includes only those ten species felt likely to have occurred, omitting obvious escapees and misidentifications.

The species accounts vary in length from more than four pages, as in the case of the well-studied Clapper Rail, to a few lines for such accidental and casual stragglers as the Least Storm-Petrel and Le Conte's Sparrow, and include species added to the list as recently as the winter of 1989–1990, such as the Yellow-billed Loon. There are lengthy and very informative accounts of the decline, disappearance, and reintroduction of the Harris' Hawk, the colonization and decline of the Brown-crested Flycatcher, and the colonization and success of the Great-tailed Grackle to name just a few. In addition there are disheartening accounts of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Vermilion Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, and Summer Tanager, all dependent on cottonwoods and willows, and all declining as rapidly as the habitat upon which they depend. However, it is encouraging to learn that the Lucy's Warbler has adapted to the widespread and ever increasing saltcedar, thus increasing in numbers after nearly disappearing from the river valley in the 1950s. Perhaps there is hope for other species.

For those interested in state lists, the accounts include five species recorded only on the Arizona side of the river that are not yet documented as occurring in California, and one species recorded only on the California side of the river not yet documented as occurring in Arizona. However, as is evident from species' accounts such as those of the Upland Sandpiper and Kentucky Warbler, it is difficult to determine from which side of the river many of the records come.

I would have liked to see more documenting photographs included. The fine photograph of a Red-necked Grebe on Lake Havasu in 1981 and the Mew Gull at Davis Dam in 1979 are still the only solid documentation for these species' occurrences in Arizona. Why not include a picture of the Northern Jacana photographed at Mittry Lake in 1986 and the Rusty Blackbird photographed in Lake Havasu City in 1982? I encourage authors of future works of this nature to follow the example set in *The Birds of British Columbia* by R. Wayne Campbell et al. (Royal British Columbia Museum, 1990), where even specimens of significant records are photo-represented.

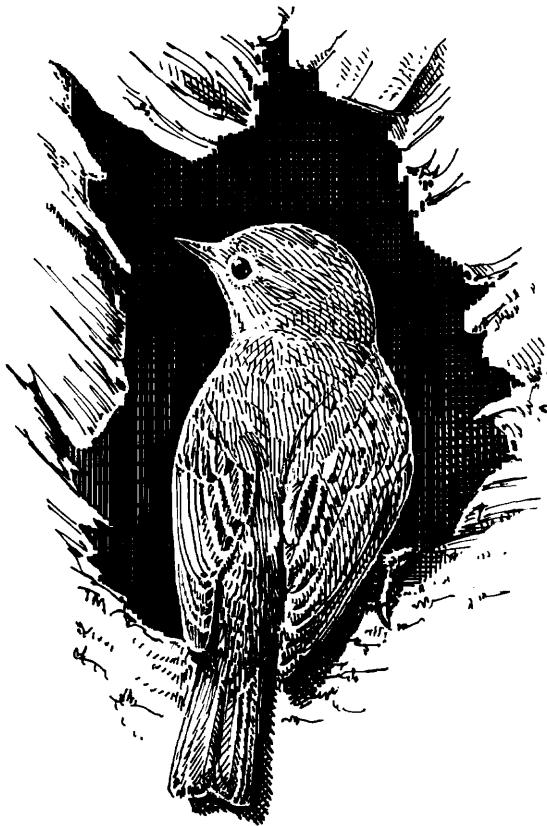
The authors indicate that only those sight records accompanied by written details, and reviewed by either them or the appropriate state review committees, are included. However, I find the undocumented sighting of the Least Grebe near Imperial Dam in 1955 included, this record having never been reviewed by the California Bird Records Committee. This only leads me to ask how many other such records are included. Even more disturbing is the inclusion of a few records that have been rejected by the appropriate state review committee, such as that of the Painted Bunting north of Blythe in 1982.

My only major criticism of the book is the virtual lack of references for specific records of rarities, unseasonable occurrences, racial identifications, and the location of specimens and photographs, an unfortunate trend that is apparent in a number of recent works of this nature. Thus, the curious reader will find him or her self unable to learn more about such remarkable records as that of a Common Nighthawk collected near Bard in 1924, a Green Kingfisher seen in the Topock Marsh in 1988, an unseasonable Pectoral Sandpiper at Martinez Lake on 30 December 1957, or the White-winged Juncos at Ehrenberg and east of Yuma without doing much detective work. Dates for specific records are generally correct, though the fact that the Pinyon Jay in Blythe is published as being present on 5 January instead of 7 January suggests some errors do exist.

The book contains four appendices, one of which is an informative summary of Christmas Bird Counts conducted at the Bill Williams Delta, Parker, and Martinez/Yuma, listing the birds to be found in winter, and their relative abundance at these

three locations at that time of the year. Another appendix graphically shows the abundance, seasonal status and habitat preference of all the birds known to occur along the Lower Colorado River, and is an excellent source of visual information to be used in conjunction with the species accounts. An extensive bibliography preceding the index includes most, if not all, major ornithological papers covering the birdlife along the Colorado River.

In summary I found the book to be well written, relatively error free, and full of useful information. It has much to offer those interested in the habitat requirements of those species regularly occurring along the Colorado River, and suggestions for those active in conservation. I consider it a must for any one interested in the status and distribution of the birds of Arizona, California, or Nevada, and a fine addition to any library on the birds of North America.



Lucy's Warbler

Sketch by Tim Manolis

## BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEES

Please send detailed descriptions and photographs documenting rare bird sightings to the addresses below.

*Arizona:* Janet Witzeman, 4619 E. Arcadia Lane, Phoenix, AZ 85018

*California:* Michael A. Patten, P.O. Box 8612, Riverside, CA 92515

*Colorado:* CFO Records Committee, Denver Museum of Natural History, City Park, Denver, CO 80205

*Idaho:* Dr. C.H. Trost, Department of Biological Sciences, Campus Box 8007, Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID 83209

*New Mexico:* John P. Hubbard, 2016 Valle Rio, Santa Fe, NM 87501

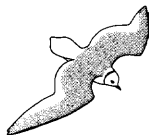
*Oregon:* Oregon Bird Records Committee, P.O. Box 10373, Eugene, OR 97440

*Utah:* Utah Ornithological Society, Ella D. Sorensen, 3868 Marsha Dr., West Valley City, UT 84120

*Vancouver, British Columbia:* Wayne C. Weber, 303-9153 Saturna Dr., Burnaby, B.C. V3J 7K1

*Washington:* Phil Mattocks, 915 E. Third Ave., Ellensburg, WA 98926

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