

## BOOK REVIEWS

**A Field Guide to the Warblers of North America**, by Jon L. Dunn and Kimball L. Garrett, illustrated by Thomas R. Schultz and Cindy House. 1997. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 656 pages, 32 color plates, 13 line drawings, 141 color photographs, 60 color maps. Hardback \$30, paperback \$20. ISBN 0-395-38971-2.

Human knowledge becomes ever more specialized, a trend reflected among ornithological field guides by numerous recent publications treating families or similar taxa rather than all birds of a given region. The North American warblers, with their beauty and popularity, stand out as an obvious choice for such a guide. No two authors are better suited to present one than Dunn and Garrett. *A Field Guide to the Warblers of North America* (hereafter "*Warblers*") stands out among these family treatments because of the two authors' balanced and extensive experience with this group. With many other guides of this nature, I have had the feeling that authors with good organizational and writing skills picked their subjects out of a hat. Not so with *Warblers*.

Jon Dunn has birded intensely since childhood and has gained a wider knowledge of North American birds than anyone I have met. These skills resulted in his being the top consultant for National Geographic's outstanding field guide to North American birds. Kimball Garrett, of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, is also an active field ornithologist with more knowledge of the avifauna of southern California than anyone. They have teamed again to produce a book of extraordinary value to both the birder and the ornithologist, one that is not simply a regurgitation of published information but a trove of personal knowledge gained from vast field experience with warblers and (as evidenced by the length of the acknowledgments) extensive connections with both the birding and the ornithological communities.

The book covers the 60 warbler species recorded in Baja California and North America north of mainland Mexico. A 42-page introduction addresses the natural history and identification of warblers, including taxonomy, hybridization, plumages and molts, habitats, foraging and food, vocalizations, behavior, breeding biology, and conservation. As is typical of the entire book, the writing style in these sections is informative and easy on the eye. Most subjects are referenced to a bibliography, leading readers to additional information.

I found the section on molts to be good, especially in comparison to other single-family guides, some of which ignore altogether this important aspect of bird identification. I applaud the authors for using the Humphrey-Parkes molt-and-plumage terminology, which is slowly gaining acceptance over earlier systems; however, they also use the terms "first spring male," "fall adult female," etc., defining plumages in a seasonal context, contrary to the Humphrey-Parkes system. The authors have explained their reasoning and, given the broad range of potential users of *Warblers*, seem justified in using these terms. It is perhaps illogical to expect beginning birders to be comfortable with the nonintuitive Humphrey-Parkes plumage terminology.

The plates are broadly appealing, although the images are somewhat variable in quality. Most are excellent—I especially like those of the genus *Dendroica*—while for some species, such as the Ovenbird and Virginia's, Worm-eating, and Wilson's warblers, the images are somewhat flat and grainy. Production of the plates during the first printing may have resulted in some of this, as it certainly has for the unnaturally olive looks to the female Black-throated Blue and *Oporornis* warblers. This apparently has been improved during later printings. What I like the most about the plates is the number of plumages depicted, ranging up to 23 (for the Yellow Warbler) and averaging 5.9 per species. An understanding of intraspecific variation (due to seasonal changes, geographic variation, and age/sex-related differences) is integral to field identification, and the plates, text, and photos in *Warblers* cover this variation extremely well.

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It is in the species accounts, comprising nearly 500 pages, that the knowledge and background of the authors become evident. Each account has a brief summary and description characterizing the species, followed by sections covering similar species, voice, behavior, habitat, distribution, status and conservation, subspecies, taxonomic relationships, plumages and molts, and references listed by subject. Each of these sections is extremely thorough, and almost every account contains some interesting tidbit of information not generally known or easily pulled from the literature. Just a few examples include a detailed chronology of the Bachman's Warbler's demise, including an assessment of every record since the 1950s, a thorough summary of how the ranges of the Golden-winged and Blue-winged warblers, and the frequency of their hybrids, have ebbed and flowed in correspondence with human-induced habitat changes, the similarity of a hybrid Black-throated Green × Townsend's Warbler to a pure Townsend's, that much of the key habitat of the Golden-cheeked Warbler was destroyed by landowners in anticipation of its listing as an endangered species, that the Black-and-white Warbler continues to be placed in the awkwardly named genus *Mniotilta* rather than *Dendroica* because the rules of nomenclature dictate that the earlier name *Mniotilta* take priority if they are lumped, a detailed account of how tail-bobbing in the two waterthrushes differs, and that, through 1995, there were 31 records of the Red-faced Warbler in six states outside of Arizona and New Mexico. Additionally the range maps, put together by Sue A. Tackett and Larry O. Rosche, are excellent, in many accounts giving detail to the county level within states. I came away from the species accounts sensing that everything known about each species was there.

It is the job of the reviewer to point out discrepancies and inconsistencies, of which I struggled to find a few. While the taxonomic information is valuable, the numerous indications that certain taxa should possibly be considered closely related (or not) to other taxa seemed a bit haphazard and unreferenced. For example, in an introductory section on warbler genera it is strongly suggested that the Ovenbird be split from *Seiurus* (the waterthrushes), while on the following page it is suggested that the Fantailed Warbler (*Euthlypis*), a distinct creature to me, be merged with *Basileuterus*. Likewise, I might argue against the idea that "a close relationship between the waterthrushes and *Dendroica* is suggested" by a single reported hybrid. Besides being inconsistent, none of these opinions is referenced, leaving me to wonder how valid they actually are. In the American Redstart account is the statement that "much needs to be learned about the exact nature of the prealternate molt in this species." In fact, more is known about this molt in American Redstart than in any of the other warblers. A general statement about our lack of knowledge of prealternate molts in most warblers would have been of greater value. Finally, without looking hard at all, I noticed several errors in the citations and two (one would have been preferable) bibliographies: DeSante and Pyle "1987" (p. 36) should have been 1986; Hall "1983" under the Yellow-throated Warbler should have been 1993; Howell, "S. W." (p. 636) should be Howell, S. N. G., and so on. That these were located without effort makes me wonder how many other errors there are in the citations.

Nonetheless, these few grievances do not come close to outweighing the many benefits of *Warblers*, a must for all birders and ornithologists.

Peter Pyle

**Warblers of Europe, Asia and North Africa**, by Kevin Baker. 1997. Princeton University Press. 400 pages, 48 color plates, many black-and-white figures. Hard-back, price not given. ISBN 0-691-01169-9.

Published in North America by Princeton University Press, this book comes from the Helm stable that brought us such classics as *Seabirds* (Harrison 1983) and *Shorebirds* (Hayman et al. 1986), with which it shares a similar format (brief