

BOOK REVIEWS

photos might be a plus (as in the more public-friendly *Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas*, by Reinking). Some of the photos are quite attractive but the quality varies considerably, and none is helped by the small scale at which they are reproduced (most 3.2 inches wide). Many were taken in or near San Diego County, but many weren't, and I see no value to having images of "plastic" ducks (i.e., birds photographed in zoos) or of photos from as far afield as Alaska and Florida. The photos help break up the text, but so do the maps, and fewer but larger photos, or even good black-and-white artwork, would be preferable—and might have lowered the cost? How many people will pay \$80 for a county bird atlas, even if it is the most comprehensive one ever produced in North America?

By now the myriad strengths of this ambitious project should be apparent. It offers a fascinating account of a diverse avifauna, and will be of great value to all western field ornithologists, southern California conservationists and agencies, and anyone else with an interest in the status, distribution, and taxonomy of North American birds. Importantly, in the increasing cluster that defines southern California, the Atlas provides baseline data that have the potential to help improve the quality of life for both avian and human inhabitants of San Diego County. Last but not least, note the relatively short lapse between completion of field work and publication—testament to good planning, which included funds for writing and editing, and to the almost single-minded dedication of the author, to whom all inhabitants of San Diego County should be grateful (whether or not they realize it or have ever looked at a bird!).

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Steve N. G. Howell

Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas, by Dan L. Reinking (editor). 2004. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman; www.oupres.com. xii + 519 pages, over 200 color maps and photos. Hardback \$59.95 (ISBN 0-8061-3409-7); paperback, \$34.95 (ISBN 0-8061-3614-6).

What does Oklahoma have to do with western birds you may ask? Well, this attractively laid out and informative work (hereafter the OBBA) should help answer such a question. Almost 230 bird species are known or assumed to have nested in Oklahoma, which straddles the biogeographic divide in North America between "East" and "West." Species breeding in this under-regarded state range from the Henslow's Sparrow to the Black-throated Sparrow, from the Wood Thrush to the Mountain Bluebird. Indeed, within a single atlas block there were breeding records for both Chuck-will's-widow and Common Poorwill! So, while Oklahoma is not a western state, it does offer a view into where the West starts from an avian perspective, and why.

The OBBA begins with acknowledgments, an introduction (discussing the work's genesis, methods, codes used, limitations, and a brief summary of results), and a succinct chapter on the state's vegetation. Then come individual species accounts, followed by two appendices (notes on an additional 12 species not recorded in the atlas years, and samples of the data forms), a bibliography, index, and the author and photo credits.

Atlasing work spanned five years (1997–2001), largely involved volunteers, and was coordinated by the George M. Sutton Avian Research Center. Protocols followed recommendations of the North American Ornithological Atlas Committee, with the census block size being the U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle (about ten square miles). Stratified sampling resulted in a total of 583 blocks being selected, of which only ten were unvisited (because of land-access issues and a shortage of volunteers). The main limitation in any such project covering an area the size of Oklahoma is that only a small area can be surveyed—in this case about a twelfth of the state's total land surface. But this was considered adequate to provide a good representation of the current distribution of most breeding species. (Fittingly, the

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Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Oklahoma's state bird, was recorded from 92.3% of blocks visited.) As well as providing important distributional information, the OBBA was viewed as a vehicle for public education, and the species accounts were written with this in mind—thus the text is very readable and each account features an attractive color photo of the species.

Rather than discussing here details of the breeding birds of Oklahoma, I recommend you examine a copy of the atlas for yourself. In simply leafing through the accounts and scanning the maps one is provided with a wealth of data to stimulate questions that can be followed up in the text, or that can be related to the introductory chapter on vegetation zones. Note, though, that a list of references is provided at the end of each species account, rather than direct citations—which can make it frustratingly time-consuming to track down specific points.

A couple of other, admittedly minor, points could be mentioned here that might benefit those working on atlases. First, including information from outside an area covered is always helpful for context. As with many works, however, this information in the OBBA tends to be uneven and could have been checked more carefully; e.g., American Goldfinches reportedly breed south only to northeast (rather than southern) California. Second, more diligent copy-editing could have corrected or clarified syntax such as “A nocturnal migrant, these grebes...” (p. 20) or that House Finches “Formerly [presumably meaning originally, rather than no longer do so] bred from southwest Canada ... south to Baja California” (p. 455).

But in general this is an excellent and very informative volume, one that will benefit field ornithologists and conservationists alike, both in western and eastern North America. All involved are to be congratulated in producing the OBBA—and in a timely manner: note that the interval from completing field work to publication was only three years, significantly shorter than many county atlases in California.

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Black-throated Sparrow

Sketch by Narca Moore-Craig