

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Birds of the Aleutian Islands, Alaska**, by Daniel D. Gibson and G. Vernon Byrd. 2007. Nuttall Ornithological Club and American Ornithologists' Union. 351 pages, 33 color photographs. Hardback, \$40.00. ISBN 978-0-943610-73-3

This book is essentially a "status and distribution" account of a fascinating avifauna, with a notable departure from the standard in that the accounts are quantified on the basis of actual surveys, specimens, and archived or published photos. As the first in a *Series in Ornithology*, the format is that of a scientific paper appearing in a journal, opening with an abstract and introduction followed by sections titled "Study Area," "Methods," "Annotated List," "Discussion," and "Literature Cited." Lengthy appendices, a gazetteer of island names, and an index (to bird names only) conclude the volume.

Based on over 30 years of field work by the authors and many others as well as an amazing amount of specimen and literature research, the presented information is intended to "describe the avian diversity...and to provide a basis for evaluating future changes." This is indeed accomplished nearly flawlessly. There appears to be absolutely nothing wrong with the data this book presents, and it probably represents one of the most thoroughly researched compendia for any area in North America (and certainly is so for any area that covers as many degrees of longitude).

In general, however, I found this book hard to use, mostly because of its formatting, as there is little to quibble about the content. It all reads rather like one huge appendix, and perhaps that is how most users will treat it. Need to know the population of Cassin's Auklet? Curious how many records of the Oriental Cuckoo there are? You will find the answers here and have no reason to doubt their veracity. But you'll have to work a bit to get the information. For one, the font has unusually thin lines and is hard to read. Also, the running heads on each page spread are the same throughout and utterly unnecessary: authors on the left page and the title of the book on the facing page. They would make sense were this work simply one short paper among several in a periodical, but given that this is a volume on its own, a more useful heading would be the actual section, such as "Species Accounts" or "Appendix 1—Avian Specimens."

You'll learn that a little black triangle before a bird name means you're in the middle of the species accounts, but you won't know where you are in the book if you don't see one. Finally, separate bits of information within the species accounts are difficult to discern, as the same font size is used throughout and the many bits of data are separated by commas, while the records are separated only by semicolons. To figure the total number of records for, say, the Oriental Greenfinch, one must carefully sift through a constellation of commas to count the semicolons. Here a few graphs would have been wonderful, but there are none. A real delight to break up this monotony is the photos. While they mostly show the variety of habitats used by birds on the islands, a few endemic subspecies are illustrated, and the mass of Short-tailed Shearwaters has to be seen to be believed.

Perhaps this is just a personal preference, but I find it a chore to have to look up all "hypothetical" species in a separate appendix. It would have not distracted from the rigor of the specimen- and photo-based data presented in other species accounts to have these species listed in the main section. Some are historically interesting, while others were surely correctly identified (and it's only a matter of time before a photo or specimen is obtained for such species as the White-crowned Sparrow and Gray-cheeked Thrush).

The "Discussion" section is one of the best parts of the book, with subchapters on the origin of the species inhabiting the islands, analysis of migration, habitat use, and changes in habitat and populations. The use of tables is liberal. There is some discussion worth parsing out of the species accounts as well, such as how populations

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have reacted to introductions of the fox and subsequent eradication programs (see the Common Eider and Cackling Goose accounts, for example) and notes on taxonomy (see Green-winged Teal). Missing from the Cackling Goose account is information on how many separate island populations are now extinct. Throughout I noticed the frequent use of the past tense, which takes some adjustment but makes sense, considering that this is a description of an avifauna during a very limited interval in history. It works to give a sense of potential change and seems to encourage the idea of continuing studies to measure the birds and their habitats.

This book clearly accomplishes what it sets out to do, and, on the basis of its content, sets a very high standard for future publications in this series. Birders and ornithologists from western North America know the Aleutian Islands as a unique bridge between the Old World and the New, giving this book global relevance.

*Richard C. Hoyer*

**Birding Colorado: Over 180 Premier Birding Sites at 93 Locations**, by Hugh Kingery. 2007. Globe Pequot Press, Guilford, CT. 336 pages. Paperback, \$19.95. ISBN 978-0-7627-3960-8

I have purchased and used in the field at least two birding guides in the Falcon series (*Birding Minnesota* and *Birding Texas*) and found them the glitzier cousins of the ABA/Lane guides, geared towards more casual or less experienced birders. The latest title in the series, Hugh Kingery's *Birding Colorado*, fits the mold perfectly. Novice and intermediate birders should be thrilled by it; more serious target-oriented birders will find it an excellent basic reference but not a superlative addition to the canon.

Perhaps the biggest asset of this book is its author. Hugh Kingery—editor of the first Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas and one of the founding fathers of Colorado birding—not only knows the state inside out, he writes beautifully and has a knack for pointing out the more colorful aspects of the sites he describes. Asides like the one on page 107, which describes how the original surveyors of Barr Lake piled buffalo chips to outline their vision of the future reservoir, add a welcome depth and wry humor to the prose that many such guides are lacking.

The site descriptions are extremely accurate and up to date. Although it introduces a couple of birding sites that were new to me (such as Red Sandstone Road in Vail) and invents a couple (such as "Raven Lane" in Kiowa County, a novel rural route for nesting Chihuahuan Ravens), the book remains pretty squarely on the beaten track as defined by birders. Faced with the difficult task of prioritizing Colorado's many birding sites, Kingery has done a nearly flawless job of picking the very best.

In terms of getting you there, the guide is pretty good but not outstanding. The regional maps at the beginning of each section suffice quite well as overviews, and in a few cases will navigate you around larger sites when such detail can be seen. When you *really* need a supplemental map, the book almost always provides one. Particularly useful are the close-up maps of urban sites in Fort Collins, Loveland, Boulder, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo. The Denver metro regional map, however, is too complex and busy to be very helpful, and the need for supplemental clarification there goes unfulfilled. DeLorme atlas grid coordinates are a nice addition to this guide that enhance its usability considerably, but more maps would greatly help it stand alone as a reference.

The guide's greatest weakness is in its treatment of target species. For the most part it will get you to the best-known sites for Colorado's most sought-after birds, but not all of them: try finding a Chukar with this book. The "Specialty Species" headers at the top of site descriptions are frustrating; they frequently fail to highlight principal target species at prime locations, such as the Dusky Grouse at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Black Rail at John Martin Reservoir, and Burrowing Owl at