

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

ALABAMA BIRDS. By Thomas A. Imhof. University of Alabama Press, University, Alabama, 1962: 7¼ × 10 in., xxx + 591 pp., 103 maps, 61 photos., 43 plates (mostly in color). \$7.50.

The introductory portion of this book occupies about 73 pages and contains the following sections: 1. Foreword. 2. Preface. 3. Tables of contents, with separate listings of (a) major sections of the text, (b) plates, (c) photographs, and (d) maps. 4. Glossary. 5. "Bird Study," under which appear six sub-headings.

The portion entitled "Species Accounts" begins with some general comments, including valuable definitions of terms used to describe relative abundance (pp. 44-56), and is followed by the systematic account of species (pp. 59-576). After this section are a bibliography (pp. 577-586) and an index (pp. 587-591).

Much of the introductory portion may be passed over without comment, but reference should be made to certain parts. A concept of the glossary may be gained by listing the first several terms: above, abundant, accidental, adult, albino, amphipod. The inclusion of "above," along with the synonymous term "dorsal," seems superfluous, aside from the fact that its meaning is obvious. The definition of "adult" as "a full-grown plant or animal" could prove confusing to a beginner at bird watching.

The heading "Bird Study" proves to be a catch-all wherein several distantly related topics are discussed in the informal, but informative, style which characterizes this work: 1. Introduction (pp. 1-10)—general public interest in birds, bird-watching equipment and references, ornithological organizations and their journals, and much other information useful to beginners; 2. Ornithology in Alabama (pp. 11-14)—a brief historical account; 3. Physiography of Alabama (pp. 14-25)—including topography, climate, and "plantlife"; 4. Birds and the Law (pp. 25-28); 5. Migration (pp. 28-38); and 6. Banding (pp. 38-43).

The bibliography appears reasonably complete, but certain omissions are puzzling in the absence of stated criteria for inclusion of articles. (Very few articles or books are referred to in the text.) Both common and colloquial names of birds, but *no scientific names*, appear in the index.

It is in the species accounts that work of this sort must make its distinctive contribution, and a single comparison points up the value of this volume. Whereas its predecessor (Howell's "Birds of Alabama," 1924) listed 274 species, Imhof's book credits the state with 352 species. After establishing residence near Birmingham in 1946, the author carried on extensive field work in 64 of the state's 67 counties. He also solicited, evaluated, and used the data of all other observers considered reliable; examined specimens in ten collections of museum skins; and received lists of Alabama specimens from four other museums. The resulting mass of information was diligently and conscientiously reviewed in the preparation of this book.

In the account of each species the first two or three paragraphs are usually concerned with identification marks, habits, and habitat, but the treatment is not entirely uniform from one species to another. Following these paragraphs come sections on nesting, food, and distribution, the last stating the total known summer and winter ranges. The advisability of including nesting data for species which do not breed in Alabama is doubtful.

Seldom should a reader be more strongly cautioned to "read the fine print" than in this work, for its very *raison d'être* appears in reduced type under the heading "Occurrence in Alabama." (Two additional paragraphs, "Time of Breeding" and "Banding," are included whenever pertinent data are available.) In this section the extreme migration

dates and highest one-day counts are presented under each of six natural divisions of the state (Tennessee Valley, Mountain Region, Piedmont, Upper Coastal Plain, Lower Coastal Plain, and Gulf Coast). The locality, year, and name of the observer are cited for each record. The inclusion of quantitative data, even though not in highly refined form, is laudable. In view of the importance of this section, it is deplorable that succinctness prevented discussion and evaluation of unusual records, leaving the reader to wonder about their validity. An added disadvantage is that the method does not lend itself to the historical approach which could develop trends of increasing or decreasing abundance. The greatest drawback, however, is that there is no provision for including more detailed information on distribution *within* each region of the state, except for those species represented by range maps. Even in the smallest of these regions (Gulf Coast) the north-south extent is more than 50 miles, and the limits of dozens of species terminate therein, but rarely are they delineated.

The book features no separate Hypothetical List, but the names of species whose status "is not completely acceptable" are enclosed in brackets. Among these are recently extirpated forms properly accredited to the state earlier, such as the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and the Ruffed Grouse (the latter re-introduced in 1958), and birds examined in the hand not preserved. Evidently these rules were applied rigidly to all species, so that none is admitted to the list on insufficient evidence. The danger in such a disposition of doubtfully recorded species, however, is that the neophyte may not realize the significance of the brackets. The necessity for specimen support should not, of course, apply only to species doubtfully recorded in the state, else the addition of a species to a state list might be followed by a rash of irresponsible records. Even though all eastern species of *Empidonax* have been collected in Alabama, additional records of silent birds caught in mist nets and released should not be given the same weight as museum specimens.

Although some mildly objectionable features of this book may be accepted as a means of gaining popular appeal, the almost complete omission of any reference to subspecies appears too great a sacrifice to make in this effort. Exceptions are made in a few cases, such as the Palm and Yellow-throated Warblers.

A few errors are almost inevitable when such a large mass of records is handled, but the per cent in this volume seems quite low. The "last authentic record" of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Florida was more recent than "March 3, 1950" (p. 340). Among the reviewer's records which are partly in error are the year of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper at Tuscaloosa (p. 258; 1938 rather than 1948), and the localities for records of the following species in the Gulf Coast region: Cedar Waxwing at *Foley* (p. 419), Prairie Warbler at *Foley* rather than *Gulf Shores* (p. 476), and Dickcissel at *Fort Morgan* rather than *Robertsdale* (p. 531). Nor have I heard the song of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher *anywhere* (p. 352). One could also take issue with the interpretation of a few records, but for the most part it is sound and conservative.

Grammatical errors are very few, and both the author and his technical editor, James E. Keeler, may be proud of the nearly complete absence of typographical errors.

Another of the fine features of this book is the abundance of range maps depicting the distribution of about 50 species in Alabama. Occasionally these show the distribution of the bird by a bounding line, but in all cases the locations of various types of records are shown by symbols. When as many as seven symbols are used (e.g., for the Swainson's Warbler), some confusion results. The symbol indicating definite breeding was inadvertently omitted for the Whip-poor-will (p. 317).

Most of the remaining maps show banding points in North America for birds recovered

in Alabama, or less frequently recovery points for those banded in Alabama. It is obvious that such pictorial representation of migratory trends in individual birds is of great value. Readers who are interested in either set of maps would be greatly aided if the two kinds were differentiated in the table of contents.

One of the most remarkable features of this book is that so many illustrations, mostly in color, could be included without raising its price excessively. Almost every species on the list, whether or not supported by a specimen, is illustrated. (The only exception noted, the Golden-crowned Sparrow, is represented by only a single sight record.) The majority of the paintings are the enviable work of Richard A. Parks. Though some may object to the crowding of so many birds on each plate, as in a field guide, my impression is that they are both accurate and attractive. Possibly through no fault of the artist, most of the thrushes (Plate 29) are too pale, and the Veery too dull. On Plate 25 the Great Crested and Ash-throated Flycatchers are *much* too pale. The artist's name is cut off the bottom of Plate 34. One may only conjecture why so many birds, females as well as males, are pictured with the bill open. Seven of the eight warblers on Plate 35 have the bill agape. The water birds (through ducks) are illustrated by David C. Hulse. Although some (e.g., diving ducks on Plate 11) are quite meritorious, these plates generally do not maintain the high standard set by Parks or by the frontispiece of a Turkey (Walter A. Weber). The Sandhill Crane (included with ibises and the Roseate Spoonbill on Plate 6) is grossly disproportionate, and the Wood Ibis is only a slight improvement. The only leg shown in the picture of the White-faced Ibis is as dark as those of the Glossy Ibis, rather than reddish.

The contributions of several photographers complete the copious illustrations. These depict adults, young, or nests and eggs of various species, particularly those of the lower orders (only 11 of 61 show passeriforms). These are generally of good caliber, although the eggs of the Red-Shouldered Hawk (p. 181) are out of focus.

A given book may be assessed either according to how well its author carries out his objectives in writing it, or in the light of what the reviewer thinks its objectives should have been. If I correctly infer the unstated objectives, Imhof has succeeded extremely well in preparing a book for readers of diverse backgrounds and interests. If any group has been slighted, it is those of a more scientific bent. In any case, weighing the book's merits against its cost, one would have to search far and wide to find a better bargain in a state bird book.—HENRY M. STEVENSON.

BIRD. By Lois and Louis Darling. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1962: 6½ × 9½ in., xiii + 261 pp. Numerous illustrations by the authors. \$5.00.

"Bird" is a delightfully illustrated, chattily written account of the behavior and structure of birds. Unfortunately, the reader must accustom himself to the rambling sentence structure and the stylistic gaucheries which he meets, particularly in the first half of the book, before he can appreciate, or benefit from, the authors' effort. While it is true that the use of "human" as a noun has become commonplace, reference to birds as being "born" is still offensive to many people. Except in children's tales, birds should be written of as "it," or "which," rather than as "he," or "whom." The reviewer would not call attention to these errors, were it not for the recurring "and/or," a usage which may be appropriate in legal descriptions, but which brings the continuity of thought, and of communication from authors to readers, to an abrupt halt. That the first half of the book gives the impression of being a first draft, unedited, imposes an unnecessary burden on the reader.

There are numerous oversimplifications throughout the book. One, only, will be cited.

"Although migration is synchronized with the breeding cycle, the basic cause for it is food." This statement is not true. Food is not the basic cause of anything. Lack of food can produce hunger, so if we impute our own sensations and interpretations to birds we can say that the lack of food may produce activity tending to reduction of unpleasant sensations. Unfortunately, as the sentence stands, it suggests to the unwary reader that birds somehow "know," during the highly food-productive late summer and early autumn months, that edible material is soon to become scarce, and that if they fly in a certain direction they will reach (and recognize) a place where such food materials will *not* be scarce in the near future.

To call food the basic cause of migration is also to raise the question of the cause of northward spring migration, from regions *not* about to become short of edible material (unless the birds "know" that they are going to raise a number of young birds, and consequently require a greater amount of food). Northward migration, based on need for food, means departure from an area which has, and will continue to have, available food. Thus two different causal mechanisms must be postulated for the two seasonal directions of migration, one operative in the spring and the other operative in the fall. There are many such oversimplifications in the book, which the reader should be warned to recognize.

Counteracting (but not counterbalancing) this criticism are the illustrations (all drawings), and the excellence of several of the chapters. Indeed, the book is as strong, textually, in its second half as it is weak in its first half. There is much of real value in "Bird" that is not to be found in any of the other available books on ornithology. This value results mainly from the marginal illustrations, which achieve the desirable but seldom attained effect of pointing up the facts as presented in the text in such a way as to make them memorable. For example, who could look at the delightful sketch of an awkward and startled *Archaeopteryx* just as it begins to fall clumsily into muddy prehistoric Bavarian waters, and not forever remember the living creature which became our oldest known fossil bird?

The second half of "Bird" is devoted to anatomy, with a nod to physiology. This part is excellent. The authors, regardless of their stated aims, appear to have kept the interested and intelligent layman, rather than the biologist or the child, in mind. They know that a large portion of their audience might find an operating room or an anatomy laboratory distasteful, and perhaps even offensive. Here the power of the illustrations is most pronounced. It would be difficult to be upset by the drawing of a plucked bird that heads the chapter, "Skin and Feathers," so the reader is led to pay careful attention to the accurate descriptions and illustrations that explain the structure, growth, and development of feathers. Bones and important muscles are well treated by the same method.

The five-page chapter on circulation is devoted primarily to the heart. Its appropriate introductory illustration is of two chickadees on the snow, in a cold-looking forest. Introducing the chapter on the urogenital system is a charming portrayal of a rooster chasing a hen. The rooster's expression is eager and intent, while the hen's head is just off the page, leaving the reader to his own imagination. An extension of this type of humor leads to the chapter on the nervous system being entitled, "The Bird Brain."

There are chapters on hormones, sense organs, and flight. The last is usually a difficult subject to explain or to understand. The Darlings have produced, in 19 well-illustrated pages, one of the best popular accounts yet written.

The book concludes with a weak epilogue which implies that practice of conservation and of respect for life are natural products of a mature humanity. They are, but the Darlings state that we have attained such maturity, and they deplore that we do not act as though we had. Here they are criticising symptoms after making a faulty diagnosis.

“Bird” is a book which cannot be given unequivocal recommendation. It is marred by stylistic weaknesses and oversimplifications. On the other hand, it undoubtedly fills one of the few gaps left in popular ornithological literature. A revised, carefully edited edition would be a valuable addition to private and public libraries throughout the country.—
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