

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

BIRDS OF THE NORTHERN FOREST. Paintings by James Fenwick Lansdowne; text by John A. Livingston. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, and Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1966: $9\frac{1}{2} \times 13$ in., 247 pp., 55 col. pl., each with half-tone of pencil (or pencil and wash) exploratory esquisse. \$15.00.

For many years I have studied with keen interest the published and unpublished work of persons often referred to as "bird artists." The term is faintly derogatory. Directors of art galleries use it by way of making clear that they consider specialists in bird portraiture not artists but naturalists or bird-lovers instead. Being called a "bird artist" does not bother me as it once did. The important thing is not to be categorized properly, but to do what one is impelled to do, and to do it well.

Human beings seem never to tire of pictures of that which they love. Abstractions are the vogue, to be sure, but Andrew Wyeth, for all his flagrant representationalism, has a tremendous following. Good bird drawings, drawings intended to look like birds rather than to explore subconscious feelings about feathers, or to illustrate fright at the sound of beating wings, will, I predict, continue to find a place in human affairs as long as our race survives. I probably have drawn our dooryard friend, the Cardinal, a hundred times. Lord knows I have not figured out a hundred different "poses," although a hundred different arrangements of adult males, adult females, young birds, and accessory material might be easy enough to devise. Never have I drawn a Cardinal tail-on. Invariably my central figure has been at least partly in profile. Two points I wish to make here. First: although I have drawn the Cardinal many times, each drawing has been different from the others, and each has had its own appeal. A reason for this is that I, the creator, though constantly changing myself, have continued to love my subject matter. I have been a different person, a different complex of ideas, opinions, and experience, each time I have drawn. I have had only to finish a painting to find myself a new man; but the new man has loved the Cardinal even as the "old" one did; the love has continued. Point two: no matter how many color plates of birds are published, they will continue to delight us so long as they represent their subject matter faithfully.

What I have just said applies to representations of living birds, not to still-lives done from mounted specimens, and not to pictures of pictures. There is a vast difference between a drawing aimed at recording an instant in the life of an alert (or, for that matter, a sleepy) organism and one aimed at showing how light falls on a stuffed specimen standing on a table near a window. A Bruno Liljefors would fully understand what I have just tried to say; so would a Jan Vermeer.

The field of bird illustration is cluttered with the work of those who have studied not the birds themselves but rather the more or less acceptable reproductions of the works of others. The public nowadays will not accept the funny double croquet-wicket that used to stand for a flying gull in the distance, or a pupil-stabbing highlight for the eye—like that employed by Elliott Coues in the pen-and-inks he made for his "Key to North American Birds." Present-day devices are of a subtler sort. But devices they are, and guilty am I, along with others, of depending on them. A long tail, a long bill, a wide-spread wing—any of these, when pointed straight at the viewer, is extremely hard to draw. How do we solve the problem? What device do we use? We put our birds in some simpler, some time-honored, some traditionally acceptable, position.

This laziness, this subterfuge, is to some extent pardonable. Difficult indeed would it be to draw warblers without using "poses" Louis Fuertes used over and over. Allan

Brooks avoided obvious repetition by fluffing body plumage and by slightly upcurving tail feathers, but neither Brooks nor anyone else can get much out of line with warblers simply because the birds themselves are the victims of such forces as center of gravity, pterylosis, and the grasping power of toes. As for such tricky variables as the opened bill, Fuertes has had no peer; a little out-and-out copying of this detail might well be recommended to all aspiring young bird artists. The British master, Archibald Thorburn, whose work I greatly admire, never did manage to draw quite accurately the wide-open bill of a gull or hawk.

James Fenwick Lansdowne is a talented young man whose bird portraiture, as recorded in "Birds of the Northern Forest," is charming and authentic. What is of far greater moment, it reveals tremendous promise. Not one of the fifty-five color plates is in any sense of the word or phrase a copy, an imitation, or a picture of a picture. Each is a Lansdowne, an autobiographical record of intimate experience with a bird in its habitat. And each reveals Lansdowne as a careful observer, a skillful delineator, and a determined person. I include this last because, having myself just finished a watercolor of a Yellow-billed Loon in breeding feather, I know how much work, how much real work, went into the correct positioning of white dots and squares in that Lansdowne *tour de force*, the Common Loon (Pl. 1).

Each picture of the fifty-five is well conceived. Each has balance. Not one is overcrowded or cluttered. The feeling for feather texture is notable. Streaking, barring, and tarsal scutellation are well handled. Not all the birds are fluffy, and this is as it should be. Not all are perfectly smooth, perfectly symmetrical. Especially enjoyable in this respect is the hungry-looking, slightly lop-sided young Whiskey Jack, the upper figure in Plate 26. Two pictures, those of the Solitary Sandpiper (Pl. 15) and Lesser Yellowlegs (Pl. 16) are highly original in that they illustrate breeding behavior comparatively few ornithologists have witnessed. The accessory material in many of the plates is beautifully drawn, especially the flowers in Plate 11, the top of the tamarack in Plate 15, the charred wood in Plate 23, and the leaves in Plates 38, 45, 46, and 47.

In certain respects we may confidently expect Lansdowne's work to improve. In time he will perceive that for a rear-view drawing of a Spruce Grouse in display to be wholly convincing (Pl. 13), a considerable amount of air or space must *seem* to exist between the spread rectrices and the upper back and scapulars. It is the artist's duty to create this illusion. Both feet of a perched Common Raven (Pl. 27) must *seem* to be connected with the bird, whatever their position on the branch. The claws of a woodpecker must cling to the bark, but the toes themselves must *seem* to be between the bark and the bird—there must be space between them and the surface to which they cling. An artist who sets himself to the task of recording facts in minute detail must show all the toes of a Pine Grosbeak when the bird is grasping a small twig (bottom figure in Pl. 52) and he must count correctly the tail feathers in a dead flicker (Pl. 9).

Color errors in reproductions may or may not be the fault of the artist. The legs of Solitary Sandpipers that I have seen, handled in the flesh, and drawn, have been far more olive-colored than those of the individual figured by Lansdowne, and in such Olive-sided Flycatchers as I have prepared as specimens the mouth-lining has had a much yellower cast than that shown in Plate 25. From the standpoint of color the Winter Wren (Pl. 30) and Tennessee Warbler (Pl. 39) are the least successful of the collection. In each of these there is too much emphasis on pattern; the Winter Wren looks almost white-faced, the Tennessee Warbler vaguely streaked on the chest.

After this digression in a minor key, let me swing back to a final, triumphant major. Parts of each of these drawings are exceptionally well done; on the whole they are

pleasing indeed; I predict that for years to come I shall point to Lansdowne's Common Loon and Red-breasted Mergansers (Pl. 8) as examples of surpassingly beautiful bird portraiture.

John A. Livingston's text, which could have been mere obbligate, is far more than that. The species write-ups, restricted as they are to one page each, cover a wide variety of subject matter, including the over-all distribution of the families to which the several birds belong; interesting and puzzling facts about food, nesting habits, molts, and habitat preference; and sound ideas concerning what is usually called conservation. Of special interest to me is the brief discussion of the regular southward movement of the Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*), a phenomenon which is, in Livingston's opinion, "apparently the result of the widespread ravages of the imported Dutch Elm disease" (opp. Pl. 22). For me a peak is reached in Livingston's prose when he says: "If we are not precisely sure what 'conservation' means any more, we do know, however, what 'preservation' means, and we do not blush to say that we are preservationists. We believe that the preservation of birds—all birds—is a legitimate aim that does not need justification on economic or any other grounds. Birds should be preserved because they are there—because they happened. That, to us, is reason enough" (p. 11). To this I am impelled to add: if birds are to be preserved their habitat must be preserved. Birds cannot exist without habitat. And glorious indeed is the habitat provided by Canada's woodlands.

Birds of the Northern Forest helps to make clear why people need birds, need them desperately. Lansdowne's paintings and Livingston's writing eloquently plead the cause both of wildlife preservation and of balance, joy, and satisfaction in human living.

—GEORGE MIKSCH SUTTON

BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA: A GUIDE TO FIELD IDENTIFICATION. By Chandler S. Robbins, Bertel Bruun, and Herbert S. Zim. Illustrated by Arthur Singer. Golden Press, New York, 1966: 4¾ × 7¾ in., 340 pp., 2,000 illus. in col. Cloth, \$4.95; paper, \$2.95.

When I first heard that a new field guide to North American birds was about to be published, I must confess that I formed an instant bias against it, for two reasons. First, the authors of the two best known extant field guides were personal friends of mine, and I felt rather protective toward them; and second, friendship aside, I felt the current guides did an excellent job, and I did not see how they could be greatly improved upon. No sooner, however, had I started thumbing through "Birds of North America," than this prejudice instantly disappeared, for it is a book of great charm. Whether it improves upon the current guides, I will discuss later; what I would like to write about first is the attractiveness of the book.

Those who have seen Arthur Singer's illustrations in Austin's "Birds of the World" will not be surprised to learn that he has done a beautiful job of illustrating Birds of North America. I was constantly impressed and delighted not only by the wealth of illustrations of birds in all sorts of plumages but also by the gratuitous little vignettes of birds engaged in various activities besides posing for their portraits: Oystercatchers displaying and probing; coots taking off from the water; herons feeding in different attitudes. I particularly liked the herons and egrets on page 95. This is a book that I would be prepared to buy myself just to have the sheer pleasure of looking at the pictures. The color reproduction in the printing is first class, with one or two small exceptions mentioned later.

The primary purpose of the book, however, as is evident from its title, is not to delight

but to inform, and it must be judged on the basis of whether it accomplishes what it sets out to do. As far as the illustrations are concerned, I think the book manifestly achieves its purpose. One of the most commendable features of the book is their abundance. Immature birds are given a great deal of coverage, a feature not sufficiently stressed by other guides. There are flight pictures not only for the usual groups such as hawks, ducks, and shorebirds, but also for many others, such as owls and alcids, not usually shown in flight. Little details I particularly appreciate are the flight comparison between immature Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night herons, and the comparative flight shapes of Common and Snowy egrets. Whole pages are given over to illustrating difficult groups—for example, hawks in flight and fall warblers—in addition to the regular pictures of the species. Thus, for the sake of easier comparison with similar species, some birds may be pictured several times. It is this continuous largesse showered on the reader that I find so very attractive. This is not a stingy book; it is illustrated with a large hand.

The publishers are to be commended for not having balked at the idea that every species should be illustrated in color. Many publishers like to cut corners by having black and white plumaged birds pictured only in black and white, the idea being that this is quite sufficient for identification. This is not wholly true, nor does it make the book more attractive. Very few birds are purely black and white, and if a dark brown bird or a black bird with gloss or sheen on its plumage is pictured as plain black, this can be misleading. I am annoyed when I find black and white illustrations in books that are largely in color, and it is to be hoped that future writers of field guides around the world will use this book to throw at publishers who complain about color being too expensive.

Before passing to the text, I want to discuss the scope and arrangement of the book which has departed from the tradition of two complementary field guides, one for eastern and one for western North America. All of North America north of Mexico is included, but not Hawaii. The criterion for inclusion of a bird is that it shall have occurred in North America at least five times in the present century. A good many casual species are thus included, and the total number of species treated is 695.

Opinions vary as to the desirability of including so large a number of species in one volume. Some people contend that such a wealth of material is confusing, especially for the beginner, and they prefer the regional guides where the choice of species is limited to those which the beginner is most likely to see. Everyone must choose a field guide which suits him, but personally I find this a rather spoiled viewpoint. Having for some years had to use Mackworth-Praed and Grant's guide to the birds of eastern Africa, which treats 1,478 species, I am perfectly delighted to use a guide which covers *only* 695 species.

The book is so arranged that the text describing a bird is on one page, and the picture of the bird is on the opposite page. This scheme is followed throughout the book and is one of its unique features. The time saved by not having to hold the book open at the illustration of a bird while thumbing through to find its description in the text is enormous. This tremendously convenient device, however, has an unfortunate corollary; due to the space limitations imposed by such a system, the text has had to be very brief with much less room for word comparisons between species than there is in other field guides. The onus is thus thrown upon the illustrations as the primary means for identification in many cases.

Given the problem of greatly reduced space, the authors are to be complimented for having produced a tight, compact text which is pared down to the bare essentials. The

text ranges roughly from three to ten lines per bird, averaging around six. Brief field notes are given, and one or two lines on abundance and habitat, with sometimes notes on special behavior that may help to identify the bird. In addition, each family is given an introductory paragraph describing its general characters, and the same is done for a number of well-marked generic groups, such as "Spotted-breasted Thrushes" (*Hylocichla* spp.) and "*Oporornis* warblers." These introductions often include useful information on habitat and behavior of the group, and this eliminates the necessity for repetitive descriptions in the text about each species. Such tight writing and avoidance of repetition are characteristic of the book throughout.

Beside the text of each species is a map giving its range. While not a new idea, it is a very good one. A lot of information is packed into each map: summer and winter ranges; areas traversed by the bird during spring and fall migration, these being distinguished by different hatching; isochronal lines for the spring months showing average arrival dates for spring migrants. The only drawback to the maps is their small size, and this again is due to space limitations. The maps would be ideal if they were all as large as the large-scale example on page 16; as it is, so much information is compressed into the tiny maps that they are sometimes difficult to read. This is especially true where a bird has a narrow coastal range; it is hard to see where the winter range (blue) ends and the resident range (purple) begins.

Birds with very restricted ranges are not given maps, their range being briefly noted in the text. They are, however, squeezed onto the same page with birds having maps. This makes for confusion, as it is not always immediately clear which map belongs to which bird. In some cases this has been circumvented by noting on the map the name of the bird to which it belongs, but not always. On page 152, for instance, the map opposite the Least Auklet obviously belongs to the Marbled Murrelet, the bird below. This is something that should certainly be corrected in future editions of the book.

Another unique feature of the book is the use of sonagrams for depicting songs and calls. To my mind this is the least successful feature. While sonagrams have value in scientific studies of bird calls, their usefulness as an aid to field identification is very limited. To begin with, considerable practice is needed in order to be able to read sonagrams; but even when some proficiency is acquired, I doubt if anyone can really imagine or "hear" a new song simply by reading its sonagram. I challenge anyone who has never heard the call of a Red-bellied or a Gila woodpecker to "hear" the difference between their calls by reading the sonagrams on page 182. Admittedly it is interesting to see what a call *which you already know* looks like as a sonagram, but this is not the point. A field guide should teach you to have an idea of a song *before* you hear it. I maintain that you cannot learn bird songs from sonagrams. Bird songs are best learned from records, of which there is a wide variety now available covering just about every North American species. In a book, they are best depicted by the time-honored method of verbal description, and the authors have been wise to include many such descriptions in the text. There is no sonagram for Coues' Flycatcher; there is no need for one. The authors' description of its call as "a sad, whistled 'ho-say mari-a'" is more effective. We all know that the Olive-sided Flycatcher says "Quick, three beers," (all that is, except the authors, who maintain it says "*whip*, three beers," thereby turning a memorable phrase into a more accurate but meaningless one). There is no need to add a sonagram of its song, as has been done; the verbal description is perfect.

There are a number of smaller points on which there is room for improvement in the book. In a number of places the color is not true, and this may in part have occurred in the printing. The Baird's Sandpiper on page 128, for instance, shows a lot of yellow in

the plumage, and looks quite different from the same bird pictured on page 125. In a number of illustrations, particularly those of flying terns and gulls, the painter has apparently attempted to indicate shadow by painting part of the underparts of these birds gray or brownish where they should be white. This is extremely confusing, particularly in a case like the Roseate Tern on page 143. The whole point about a Roseate Tern in summer dress is that it is whiter below (even pinkish sometimes) than the similar Arctic and Common terns, and yet here a Roseate labelled "summer" is pictured as gray below. This is a case where artistic effect should definitely be passed up in favor of formal color accuracy.

Something has gone wrong with the flight pictures of Least, Semipalmated, and Western sandpipers on page 125; they are all far too dark. The flying Black Guillemot on page 149 presents an anatomical puzzle as regards the position of the wings. The head pictures of Ruff and Reeve on page 123 are useless for field identification, especially as no two males are ever quite alike in spring dress. If there is no room for a full-length or a flight picture, the birds are best left out. On the same page, I cannot understand why the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is shown in summer dress, when by the authors' own admission the bird is a fall visitor only, and the fall plumage is quite different. On page 94, we are left to assume that the unlabelled bird standing next to the Great Blue Heron is an immature bird of that species. Or is it a female? Or in winter plumage? The beginner needs to know.

It is a pity that only the head of Cory's Shearwater is illustrated, on the grounds that, as stated in the text, it has "plumage the same as the Pink-footed's." Not only is this an unscientific remark, as the birds belong to quite different species, but it obscures a piece of information vital for field identification, which is not mentioned anywhere in the text. The upper tail coverts of Cory's Shearwater can be very pale, almost whitish at times, giving the effect of a narrow pale band above the dark tail tip, causing confusion with the Greater Shearwater. The Pink-footed Shearwater as illustrated, on the other hand, has the upper tail coverts even darker than the rest of the upperparts. The text needs to be tightened up in this case, too, and it should be pointed out that the best field mark for telling Cory's and Greater shearwaters apart is not the pale band on the tail but the contrast between dark cap and light cheeks in the Greater.

With regard to price, I think that \$2.95 for the paper cover edition of this book represents unparalleled value for money. It is incredible that a book with over 150 pages of colored illustrations should sell for under three dollars. Furthermore, the size of the book is another selling point. Most field guides today are small, but still are too large to fit into the pockets of many jackets without some squeezing. In this book, the use of a soft cover reduces its dimensions all round, and its thickness is less than three quarters of an inch. It thus fits comfortably into any but the smallest pockets.

In conclusion, in spite of some drawbacks, this is a really excellent book, and I heartily commend it. It will not replace the older field guides, because they contain additional features. Rather, it should be used to complement them, because it, likewise, contains features which they lack. It is so cheap that everyone can afford to buy it in addition to their other books. As to that inevitable, awkward question, "If you only had room for one guide, which one would you take?" I will sidestep it by saying that I usually take more than one guide with me in any case. I suggest that every field birdman makes sure that he has a spare pocket large enough for Birds of North America.

—STUART KEITH

THE BIRDS OF SHAKESPEARE. By James Edmund Harting. Including OF MEN AND BIRDS: PROLEGOMENA TO THE BIRDS OF SHAKESPEARE. By Grundy Steiner. Argonaut Inc., Chicago, 1965: $6\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in., xxxviii + 321 pp., 33 illus., 1 table. \$7.50.

The re-issue of "The Birds of Shakespeare" by J. E. Harting is an important event for all students of the poet. This book, first published in 1871 and long out of print, not only was the first complete survey of the subject but also remains the best. In making Harting's study again accessible, the Argonaut Press has rendered a valuable service.

Emphasis in the book is placed upon the poet's knowledge of falconry. This is suggested in the frontispiece, where the fine figure of a Peregrine Falcon drawn by Wolf, the famous German artist, has been superimposed upon the Chandos portrait. A wealth of further engravings throughout the book illustrates the subject at hand.

Nine chapters deal with birds in a natural grouping. Following passages containing allusion to the eagle and other large birds, the author proceeds to what is perhaps his most valuable chapter, "Hawks and Hawking." Quotations accompany explanation of the falconer's jargon—*tower*, *point*, *pitch*, *seel*, *watch*, *tire*, and others, terms which came naturally to the poet. Later, in Chapter 7, the author passes to the complementary theme, "Game-birds and 'Quarry' flown at by Falconers." Not least interesting here are quotations from royal household accounts showing an astonishing variety of table birds with the price paid for each.

In his prefatory essay, "Of Men and Birds," Professor Steiner of Northwestern University reviews the role of birds among Greeks and Romans to emphasize the force of tradition in Shakespeare's time. He remarks the extent to which the poet leans toward contemporary taste rather than to ornithological fact. He believes rightly that the plays reflect "a preponderance of tradition over observation." Mr. Harting is kinder to Shakespeare than to his own contemporary, Alfred Tennyson. Allusions to birds by the laureate, he writes elsewhere, tend to prove that he had "neither a good eye for colour nor a good ear for bird music," that in short, Tennyson was "inferior to many English poets who have preceded him" (*The Zoologist*, 1883, p. 145). But whatever its faults, all of them minor, Harting on Shakespeare's birds is admirable throughout. Here is a reprint that every lover of birds and poetry should own.—THOMAS P. HARRISON

BIRDS OF EUROPE. Illustrations by John Gould. Text by A. Rutgers. Barnes & Noble, New York (first published by Methuen & Company, London), 1966: $7\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{7}{8}$ in., 320 pp., 160 col. pls. \$15.00.

This is not really a book in the usual sense but a well-reproduced selection of lithographs that first appeared in Gould's "The Birds of Europe" (1837) and "The Birds of Great Britain" (1862-73). Opposite each plate is a page of brief text, written for this volume, sometimes describing the species shown and giving a little information on habitat, behavior, nesting habits, and vocalizations. Strangely lacking is a preface or any introductory material other than a table of contents. Nowhere is there one word about the author of the text, the sources of his information and the objectives of his presentation; and worse still, not one word about John Gould (1804-1881). Except for one dated quotation (p. 1) from *The Birds of Europe*, the reader has no way of knowing how long ago the lithographs were first published. The only information about Gould—and most inadequate—is on the front flyleaf of the jacket. Here the publishers give a few laudatory generalities about Gould's work and mention the volumes from which the present lithographs were taken, but give no dates and state that successive volumes will cover Gould's work on Asia, Australia, New Guinea, and South America. Hopefully they will be more

than "non-books" such as this one. Much as the plates from Gould's works, all of them rare, are welcome, they should be given historical perspective.—OLIN SEWALL PETTINGILL, JR.

BUGS OR PEOPLE? By Wheeler McMillen. Appleton-Century, New York, 1965: 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., xi + 288 pp. \$4.95.

The jacket of this book includes the subtitle "A Reasoned Answer to Opponents of Pesticides"; this should be enough to forewarn the reader that a polemic is forthcoming. The author is an experienced agricultural writer who has had a long and distinguished career of service. He begins with an intimate but somewhat clumsy description of the antics of Timmy, the titmouse, on the author's breakfast terrace. This gambit is apparently designed to assure us of the author's deep and abiding concern for wildlife. The effect on me was somewhat uncertain and my unallayed suspicions were confirmed in the third chapter when the real target of the book is brought to focus: it is, of course, Rachel Carson and "Silent Spring." It is odd that an excellent and more recent review (Rudd's "Pesticides and the Living Landscape") should be overlooked by the author. This is perhaps a good measure of the continuing effectiveness of Miss Carson's role as the protagonist to the pesticide industry.

In attempting to construct a rebuttal to *Silent Spring*, Mr. McMillen's principal stratagem is to balance the continued need for pesticides to sustain production of food, fiber, and timber against the risks of damage to fish and wildlife. This position is undeniably one of great inherent strength; however, the author misjudges his material. To begin with, he fails to understand that threats to the robust success story of American agriculture are not likely to catch our imagination with half the force of the continued threats to an already depleted and beleaguered wildlife resource. Furthermore, the success story is poorly told. The author attempts to pull in an impressive assortment of specifics to set up his arguments. He is not deft in doing so and misses many excellent opportunities (as on p. 46) in describing biological control of the Klamath weed. He refers (p. 46) to the weed as "spread over several hundred thousand acres of once-good native pastures in Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Nevada . . .". By failing to check his sources carefully, the author has missed his mark by a fifteen-fold underestimate; actually, more than 5 million acres were affected by the Klamath weed! There are many other examples where the author's lack of precision destroys the impact of his argument (as on p. 43): "The predatory insects, which make their living by *destroying other species* . . .".

Secondly, the author shows a startling lack of ecological perspective in his failure to understand that the principal threat of pesticides to fish and wildlife is an indirect one, namely, through the action of bio-accumulation. For example, in discussing the Mississippi River fish kill (p. 159) he asks "Could pollutions from higher up in the Mississippi and Missouri Valleys have acquired deadly effect only after they had reached so near to the big river's mouth?"

Lastly, the author fails to understand that, if the national challenge of the past century was to attain an adequate standard of living for all, the challenge of the coming century will be to preserve the quality of the environment. The author's view of man's relationship to his environment is summed up in a concluding chapter on "What Needs to Be Done." His response is "We should proceed to master our environment." One cannot help but wonder what room would be left for "bugs" and other forms of wildlife in a "mastered" environment.—DANIEL Q. THOMPSON