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A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America, Fourth Edition, Completely Revised and Enlarged

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SPECIAL REVIEW

A field guide to the birds of eastern and central North America, fourth edition, completely revised and enlarged.—Roger Tory Peterson. 1980. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 384 pp., 124 full color plates, 12 monochrome plates, 390 range maps. \$15.00 cloth, \$9.95 paper.—Roger Tory Peterson's "Field guide to the birds," first published in 1934, served as a model for a successful series of field guides, and it is generally accepted that this series, with its quick-recognition system, helped to pave the way for the environmental movement of the 1960s. These field guides helped people to identify many of the organisms with which we share this earth. This new knowledge led to love and respect and eventually to a deep concern for the welfare and continued existence of these organisms. Therefore Peterson's "Field guide to the birds," in its several editions, must rank as one of the most influential and noteworthy books of the century. Now, published in a fourth, "completely revised edition," it is the subject of this special review by several of Florida's outstanding students of the field identification of birds.

First some details of the contents. "Completely new!" is the banner on the cover, but that is not completely accurate. Although the major part of this edition is different from previous editions, you will find familiar things. Retained unchanged from early editions are the "roadside" and "flight silhouettes." Segments retained but redrawn or rewritten include, "topography of a bird, bird songs, conservation note, life (systematic check list) list," and "further readings." Seven plates depicting 111 species replace "Appendix I Accidentals" listing 85 species. Missing in this newest edition are "shore silhouettes," the detailed treatment of subspecies in "Appendix II," and black and white drawings in the text. New items discussed briefly are "bird nests" and "birding hotspots." An excellent new section "how to identify birds" is from an earlier (1947) Peterson book, "How to know the birds."

The two major changes from earlier editions are the 390 (6 per page) detailed range maps and the new color plates. Having the plates face the text leaves less space for text and therefore the species' descriptions are brief and the "similar species" portions of earlier editions are omitted. The color plates illustrate usually 4 or 5 species per plate (range 3-7) except for "confusing fall warblers" with 12 or 14 per plate and "accidentals and exotics" with 7-23 species per plate. The images on the new color plates are larger, brighter, and more detailed than those in earlier editions. Certainly, color plate technology now gives excellent fidelity to the artist's work, and it would be useful to students of Peterson's art to see some of the earlier field guide illustrations reproduced with today's technology. Comparing this fourth edition with earlier ones (and with Peterson's other bird guides) was a revelation. One can only marvel at Peterson's creative energies expressed by the continual evolution and change in his pictures of birds.

The reviewers for this special review include Lyn Atherton, one of Florida's keenest birders and the southeast's leading student of the field identification of gulls; C. Wesley Biggs, member of the FOS check-list committee, bird-tour leader, and a leading Florida birder; and Malcolm M. Simons, Jr., Director of the Beached Bird Survey and teacher of an adult education course in bird identification at Port Charlotte Cultural Center for 6 years.—FRED E. LOHRER.

Although this fourth edition is a significant improvement over previous editions, it is, nonetheless, a disappointment in terms of format, accuracy of illustrations and use of pertinent knowledge gained since the original edition was published. Apparently none of the many outstanding professional and amateur field ornithologists in North America and Europe were given drafts of the guide to review. If they were, then apparently their advice was not taken. Otherwise, never would so many errors occur in one book.

Why did Peterson not arrange the species in the widely accepted A.O.U. check-list order? Locating a particular species in this guide becomes very frustrating. Even the beginning birdwatcher should understand and attempt to learn the taxonomic arrangement of species. Such knowledge may eliminate some errors in identification as closely related orders, families or species of birds, though sometimes not similar in plumage, many times have similar behavior and/or vocalizations which often aid in correct identification. Peterson has orders completely out of sequence, families of one order separated by families from other orders, and in some instances, shorebirds and warblers, species in a family arranged by color! Peterson apparently chose to ignore the resounding criticisms of the recently published "Audubon Society field guide to North American birds."

I anxiously awaited the new edition expecting that most of the mistakes in the previous edition would be corrected because of the significant advancements made in field identification by amateur and professional ornithologists. As I first glanced through the book, my high expectations rapidly turned to extreme disillusionment. Errors in the illustrations abound thus creating more confusion with the already "confusing species." In the illustrations of loons (p. 33), the side of the neck of the winter-plumaged Arctic Loon has a distinct dark "patch" at the base whereas the same area on the winter-plumaged Common Loon is ill-defined. In fact, the opposite is true. In Florida, where extremely small Common Loons occasionally occur, misidentifications are made because these field marks were not illustrated in the earlier editions.

Numerous errors exist in the immature gull illustrations, yet it is in these plumages that most errors in identification have been made and now, I'm sure, will continue to be made. For example, the color of the bill of the Glaucous Gull in both first and second year is pink with a *sharply defined* blackish tip. Yet, Peterson has failed to depict this correctly in the head illustration (p. 91), where the bill is the key character. The Iceland Gull's bill is never like that of the Glaucous Gull, yet small Glaucous Gulls have been misidentified as Iceland Gulls because of incorrect illustrations in the field guides. To have illustrated only the head of the California Gull was unfortunate as first winter Herring Gulls often have similar "bi-colored" bills. Probably many immature Franklin's Gulls have been overlooked because of their similarity to immature Laughing Gulls, yet they actually can be identified very easily in the field when the diagnostic characteristics are known. The first-winter Laughing Gull plumages illustrated (p. 93), are actually *juvinal* plumages and the second-winter Laughing Gull should have *white* rectrices. Furthermore, Peterson incorrectly states (p. 92) that "first-year Laughing Gull, however, is readily separated from Franklin's by its brown breast, brown forehead." He has actually described the *juvinal* plumage of the Laughing Gull. This is replaced usually in October or November by the first-winter plumage in which the species *does* have a white forehead and a grayish breast. Peterson also failed

to point out the 3 white outer rectrices (the "clinch" if one needs it) on the first-winter Franklin's Gull. The immature plumages of Thayer's Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull were omitted altogether, yet these birds in most instances can be distinguished in the field.

The illustrations of "peeps" (p. 135) do not help to alleviate the difficulties of identifying species in this confusing group. The summer plumages as illustrated are not significantly different from the winter plumages. However, the breeding plumaged Semipalmated Sandpiper is heavily marked on the upper breast and the breeding plumaged Western Sandpiper has much rust color on the head and mantle. In summer plumage, the White-rumped Sandpiper's belly is very white rather than the buff tone illustrated. In each species, the bills are illustrated differently in the summer and winter plumages. Even the bills of two of the "peeps" shown at the bottom of the page are incorrect. The bill of the Least Sandpiper should droop slightly toward the tip and the Semipalmated Sandpiper's bill should be slightly *bulbous* on the tip. It is also important to understand that on some Western Sandpipers it is difficult to detect the droop in the bill. Because the range in bill lengths of Western Sandpipers can overlap that of Semipalmated Sandpipers, it is important when observing winter-plumaged birds of these two species to know the bill shapes of both.

In Florida, misidentifications have been made when distinguishing between the similar immature Broad-winged and Red-shouldered hawks. In the immature Broad-wing, the ventral surface of the tail has dark bars *narrower* than the pale areas; this being the most reliable field mark if the bird in question is silent. However, Peterson failed to illustrate correctly the barring on the rectrices of the immature Red-shouldered (p. 157). As in the illustration of the adult "pale S Florida form," the immature also has dark bars as wide or wider than the pale areas. And do not expect that red shoulder patch on the immature Red-shoulder as illustrated.

In Florida, the breeding season of nesting species often extends beyond that of other states, therefore an observer is likely to see some juvenal-plumaged birds in August and September. As we also get migrants during these months some misidentifications have been made of juvenal-plumaged White-eyed Vireos as Bell's Vireos. Perhaps this error has been made in other states also. Before the immature White-eyed Vireo acquires any yellow in the plumage, it is very buffy with pale, almost white, lores and has dark irides. Therefore, one unfamiliar with Bell's Vireo could understandably make the wrong identification. Peterson should have included an illustration of the juvenal-plumaged White-eyed Vireo and should have pointed out its bolder wing bars in contrast to the faint wing bars of Bell's Vireo.

Often one only sees a warbler from below before it disappears. The ventral side of the tail is an important diagnostic feature. Yet Peterson failed to show this aspect on any of the warbler illustrations. Also, he incorrectly illustrated some of the warblers and in other instances failed to point out the most important diagnostic characteristics that he did illustrate! The bill on the Swainson's Warbler (p. 241) should be longer and very straight and the crown rufous, contrasting with the back. Concerning the waterthrushes (p. 247), Peterson should have shown in the illustrations and explained in the text that the width of the supercillium *behind* the eye is the most important criterion for distinguishing between the Louisiana Waterthrush and the whiter form of Northern Waterthrush. The supercillium *widens* behind the eye of the

Louisiana Waterthrush but it remains *uniform* on the Northern Waterthrush. In the text (p. 246), Peterson states "Some Northern Waterthrushes in fall . . . have whitish eyebrow stripes." This is very misleading for in Florida it is much more likely to encounter this "whiter" Northern Waterthrush in the spring. As a matter of fact, 6 of the 8 northward-bound Northern Waterthrushes that I have observed by this writing (mid-April) have been this "whiter" form. In Florida, some warblers (Yellow-rumped, Blackpoll, and Cape May) retain the fall plumage into spring thereby creating confusion for the novice. It is fine to have a section for quick reference for fall plumages, but I think that the various plumages of a species should be placed together opposite the text. For on the female Yellow Warbler (p. 239), the faint yellow wing bars and pale edgings on the remiges are diagnostic marks, even when the tail-spots cannot be seen, and allow this species to be quickly distinguished from the similar female Wilson's Warbler. The female Common Yellowthroat (p. 251) has a buffy, indistinct eye-ring, not yellow "spectacles" as shown. And the very diagnostic "whisker" on the female Dickcissel (p. 263) is lacking. This mark is especially important when dealing with fall and winter birds that lack noticeable yellow in the plumage. Although Peterson's philosophy is to accentuate the main diagnostic features, he should at least illustrate the other parts of the bird correctly.

Peterson did make the range maps larger than those in other guides, but he failed to capitalize on the purpose of doing so—to make them more useful to the reader. No pattern of migration is shown on the maps. This could be confusing especially for Florida, where many migrants that are common in spring are uncommon or even rare in the fall and vice-versa. These are helpful facts, yet they cannot be derived from the range maps.

A field guide is used mainly by novices. One of its main purposes should be to help the observer to differentiate between similar species. This book fails in many instances to achieve that goal. Peterson had the potential to produce the near perfect guide, but he failed to use his greatest resource—the outstanding field ornithologists throughout this country. I have to believe that he was pressured into getting this publication out as soon as possible regardless of the consequences, thereby allowing a great injustice to be done to one who has done so much to promote conservation and the study of plant and animal life throughout the world.—LYN ATHERTON.

When I was 8 years old Roger Tory Peterson joined the illustrious company of Hank Aaron, Roy Chapman Andrews, Frank Buck, and Teddy Roosevelt on my all time hero list. The fact that he will always be there makes it hard, if not impossible to review one of his works on an impartial basis. I am not apologizing for this, only stating a fact.

In 1943 Peterson's good friend Joe Hickey wrote the following: "Bird watching embraces individual enterprise on the one hand, collective effort on the other. Above all else, it is marked by a ready exchange of experience, by a high regard for truth, and by a conviction that wild birds express the most spectacular development of nature." As the work of a self-professed bird watcher, Peterson's revised field guide also qualifies for this definition. The individual enterprise is reflected most notably in the hundreds of beautiful illustrations. The long list of contributors attests to the collective effort. A

concise, informative text imparts effectively the experiences and truth that the author wanted to convey, and a glance anywhere in the book will reveal Peterson's conviction that birds are indeed the most spectacular development of nature.

I have purposely refrained from reading other reviews of this book although I've been told that at least one or two others have enumerated mistakes mostly involving technical aspects of some of the illustrations. I must admit that I too found a number of rather inexplicable errors, but my major criticism lies not with individual birds, but with the formation of the flock.

The arrangement of the species in eight main visual categories instead of in a taxonomic sequence is more of a hindrance than a help. For the experienced field observer accustomed to the AOU taxonomic sequence it is a frustrating waste of time to refer to the index to find things. Sections such as "How to identify birds" indicate that the book is designed in large part for the beginning birder, but for the novice trying to learn taxonomic sequence this new arrangement will create unnecessary difficulties. I would have been satisfied with the use of the 1957 AOU check-list order and its amendments or the proposed order for the 1983 AOU check-list.

For the sake of continuity, all accidentals from Eurasia and the tropics and all exotic species should have been included in the respective labeled plates, or those plates should have been eliminated and all species included in the main text. Granted, Curlew Sandpipers and Ruffs are more common than most other accidentals from Eurasia but they should be included with the others. Since the book is not in taxonomic order and all the extant parrots are exotics I feel that the Psittacidae should have been placed at the rear of the book after the exotics instead of in the middle.

The following are a few unrelated things that particularly annoyed me: Accidentals and established introductions were left off of the systematic check-list; King Vulture was included in the main text; a number of accidentals from the tropics were not illustrated, most notably Tropical and Loggerhead kingbirds and Thick-billed Vireo. If any one of a number of qualified Florida ornithologists had been asked to review the manuscript before publication quite a few mistakes could have been eliminated.

In the fieldguide illustrating game, Roger Tory Peterson and Guy Tudor sit at the head of the table. Peterson's revised guide is without question the most beautifully done North American guide to date. His birds are truly alive. I particularly like the text-facing-illustration format and the introduction of range maps accompanied by range related data. Insets of extinct species are a welcome addition, and the small number of species per plate is visually very pleasing. The beauty and worthwhile aspects of this book far outweigh the few drawbacks.—C. WESLEY BIGGS.

Peterson's new edition is a vast improvement over the previous ones, although from the standpoint of use as a teaching aid it has a few shortcomings.

One of the first comments of two students who had just returned from a trip to Texas was that many of the birds which they saw in south Texas were not shown in this book. I see no reason why Peterson's line of demarcation should not have extended straight south through Texas to take in the lower Gulf coast and the lower Rio Grande Valley, and the birds of those regions,

other than perhaps to maintain sales of the separate field guide (already in print) to that area.

I am glad that Peterson has included a systematic check list in correct phylogenetic order, but am less happy with his tinkering with this arrangement in the main text of the book. I can see some merit, for example, in showing the American Coot with the ducks, since most beginners see it as essentially a "duck." But what is gained by moving the alcids into the place usually occupied by the tubenoses, and placing the tubenoses after the ducks? Perhaps the hawks will do well next to the owls, and the swifts with the swallows, but in general I decry any deviation from the standard taxonomic sequence. I think that it is especially unfortunate that each of the three major field guides now has a different arrangement of the species.

The new section on "How to identify birds" (pp. 23-30), is a welcome exposition of the Peterson system, and has already proved useful in the classroom.

I am pleased that he has used up-to-date common names for all species, but has retained reference to former names, as many beginners who have been using older field guides or texts find the proliferation of names confusing.

Probably the single greatest improvement is the placing of the color plates opposite the species descriptions, although this has resulted in the use of less descriptive text than in former editions. The larger, clearer illustrations are, with a few exceptions, excellent. The subtle browns of the sparrows are especially well done. An example of an exception to the generally good artistry is the Wilson's Plover (p. 120). While the text correctly describes the leg color as "flesh gray," the illustration shows it as distinctly yellowish. It was much better in the previous edition. I was especially glad to find that he has retained the page on sorting out the *Empidonax* flycatchers. It is much the best guide to this difficult genus of anything readily available to the beginner. Also, his "confusing fall warblers" are considerably improved.

Peterson spells out bird songs in syllables much the way that I hear them, so of course I like this feature. I have yet to find a student who can make much practical use of a sonogram, even if he understands what it means, and must confess that to me it has little predictive value as to what an unfamiliar species is apt to sound like in the field.

The addition of 137 new species greatly enhances the usefulness of the guide in keeping track of introductions and range expansions. Especially welcome to Florida birders are the sections on parrots and other exotics and escapees. Beginners seem to have a predilection for seeing these birds and wondering why they are not in the books, so at last we have most of them in a field guide.

The new, large maps of wintering and breeding ranges are superb. Dispersals and wanderings are included, as well as areas of casual occurrence for some species. But, alas, only passing reference is made to migration routes. Certainly, inclusion of migratory paths and at least approximate times of passage would have been a worthwhile addition to the maps.

When I asked Mr. Peterson whether there were any things that he wished he had done differently now that the book is open to public scrutiny, he said that indeed there were some things that he wished he could have done differently even while he was working on the book. But he was limited by requirements of space and cost. Truly these factors do constrain us all, even the mighty.—MALCOLM M. SIMONS, JR.