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Wood Warblers' World

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Donald M. Kent, Biology Department, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts 02215.

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REVIEW

Wood warblers' world.—Hal H. Harrison. 1984. New York, Simon and Schuster. 24 pages of color photographs; numerous black and white photographs. \$19.95.—What Florida Field Naturalist reader does not enjoy natural history vignettes of birds? This is the nature of Harrison's book. If the book had only been represented as exactly such, the reviewer's assignment would have been comfortable. Hal Harrison is to be congratulated for enjoyable readings about a fascinating taxon of birds.

Book jackets are, to be sure, advertising devices. They are designed to attract, designed to impress. This jacket beckons with comments about the book's contents. "Documented information from every source, published and unpublished." "The outstanding book on Wood Warblers." "The most comprehensive book on the subject ever published." Compelling comments, indeed! Expectations could hardly be more inflated. What reviewer isn't eager to critique the "outstanding"!

Author Harrison is a resident of south Florida (as is this reviewer). Only a very few species of warblers breed in south Florida. This situation alone suggests that more than cursory attention be accorded them. I read first the chapters devoted to "our" warblers.

In 1942 Roger T. Peterson and Earle Greene discovered Golden Warblers (now regarded a subspecies of the Yellow Warbler) breeding on the Florida Keys (see E. R. Greene, 1946, "Birds of the lower Florida Keys," Proc. Fla. Acad. Sci. 8:199-265). This was a noteworthy event! The depauperate breeding land bird avifauna of south Florida had been augmented naturally by a colonizing species from a neighboring land mass. In subsequent years the warbler spread northward along the Keys and eventually established itself on the mainland (see, e.g., O. T. Owre, 1976, "The avifauna of Biscayne Bay," Univ. Miami Sea Grant Spec. Rpt. 5:214-226). As a result of this colonization, Florida *now* has a breeding form of the Yellow Warbler. I found no mention of this in the species' account. But careful scrutiny of the breeding range map (p. 98) reveals that, although the Florida Keys are not figured (!), an area of ocean corresponding to the Keys' location is very lightly cross-hatched.

A race of the Prairie Warbler is present year-round "in the mangroves bordering coastal marshes of southern Florida" (p. 180). Prairie Warblers are very much part of the coastal mangrove avifauna. From the mainland all the way to Key West and beyond, their songs are an outstanding aural component of the landscape. The Florida Keys aren't figured on the breeding range map (p. 183) for this species either. And not even the area of the ocean where the keys should be is cross-hatched.

As for the mangroves that the Florida race inhabits, I dislike quibbling, but mangroves don't only "border coastal marshes" (p. 180). Mangroves may be the only fringing growth of the coast and they even form islets—with or without marshes. One more point. Isn't it

of more than ordinary interest that here in the mangroves we have what amounts to an "ecological race" of this warbler? And now I'll really be subjective. My goodness, Hal Harrison, I would have said less about the Prairie Warblers of the Southeast's bush-clearings and forest-edge areas. I would have written about Florida's mangroves, tree-forests *standing in salt water*, and their inhabitants, Prairie and Yellow Warblers among them. More than that, I would have described the throngs of warblers in springtime, migrants tired from their over-ocean flight, flitting about in the welcome canopy of the mangroves—landfall they had struggled for hundreds of miles to reach.

The breeding range map (p. 171) of the Pine Warbler draws my comment. Why "chop-off" the breeding range at the coastline? (You have chopped-off breeding ranges of quite a few western U.S. species at the Mexican border.) It helps one's overview of a species to know what the *entire* breeding range is. The Pine Warbler, for example, also breeds in the northern Bahama Islands and on Hispaniola. John Emlen (1978, "Density anomalies and regulatory mechanisms in land bird populations on the Florida peninsula," *Amer. Nat.* 112:265-286) found surprisingly denser populations of the Pine Warbler in the Bahamas than in Florida. Of more than ordinary interest, I would say, and possibly worthy of comment in the "most comprehensive" book on warblers.

Well, what else makes this book "outstanding"? The illustrations? *I'd* be pleased to have taken most of these color photographs. But can they be outstanding illustrations of these species? The singing Bachman's Warbler (plate 2) is out of focus. I can't make out much of the male MacGillivray's Warbler (plate 24). I can't discern the shapes of the bills of the male Black-throated Blue Warbler (plate 4) or of the male Townsend's Warbler (plate 8). Do male Connecticut Warblers (plate 24) and female Worm-eating Warblers (plate 18) really have blue heads and necks? Most of the photographs would be enhanced by enlargement to full page size as with the Cerulean Warbler (plate 17); as it is, most pictures are small and overcrowded on the pages. In my opinion, most of the color photographs are not outstanding. Adequate photographs of small birds, I realize, are difficult to achieve. For what I regard as some really outstanding color photographs of small birds see those by Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet in Patricia Bradley's "Birds of the Cayman Islands", 1985, Singapore, World-Wide Printing. Good paintings, reproduced as color plates, that better depict all of these species are not, however, difficult to find.

We have noted important references not in the Bibliography. Mind you, the jacket says, "documented information from every source. . . ." Robert MacArthur helped establish modern concepts of niche partitioning and other aspects of ecology. His doctoral dissertation emphasized five species of warblers. These five are sometimes spoken of as "MacArthur's warblers." Nowhere in the Bibliography do I find mention of MacArthur's "Population ecology of some warblers of northeastern coniferous forests" (1958, *Ecology* 39: 599-619)—or for that matter of any of MacArthur's publications in which wood warblers figured so prominently.

I enjoyed reading "Wood warblers' world." I appreciate the author's homely species' accounts. The subjective comments I have made about some of these are of the nature engendered by any review. They are not serious criticisms. My serious opinions—and I dislike being critical about such a book—result from being misled. Mr. Publisher, you beguiled me. I don't think it professional to take such a nice book and say misleading things about it. Certainly, this is the only book on North American warblers now in print. But that doesn't mean that it is, as I interpret your jacket, "outstanding." It is not the "comprehensive" work I think you have implied. And it doesn't have a "Bibliography", it has a "References Cited."

By the way, before I placed this book on my shelf, I removed the jacket.—Oscar T. Owre, Department of Biology, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida 33124.