

1985

## Books

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(Inland)

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## Books

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**The care and breeding of seed-eating birds.** Finches and allied species - doves, quail and hemipodes. Jeffrey Trollope. 1983. Blandford Press, Poole, Dorset, England. Distributed in U.S.A. by Sterling, New York. 336 pp. \$17.95 U.S., \$22.95 Can.

Trollope has drawn on years of personal experience in combination with extensive literature research to produce a book that is both authoritative and easy to read. The eleven chapters are divided into two parts - general care (accommodation; nutrition and food; obtaining stock and management; breeding), and species accounts (7 chapters with a family per chapter). Although intended primarily for aviculturalists, some of the cages and catching methods in the introductory chapters are of interest to banders, and the book is highly recommended to those banders who (by design or default) wind up running bird "hospitals", and those researchers who combine studies in the wild with observation on birds in captivity.

The seven chapters of species accounts cover the 4 "finch" or "sparrow" families (Emberizidae, Fringillidae, Estrildidae, Ploceidae), smaller quail, hemipodes ("button quail", related to cranes), and pigeons and doves. Pheasants, grouse, partridge, turkey and aquatic seed-eaters are not included. Each species account includes a combination of behavior/habitat/distribution material from the wild and information on care and breeding in captivity. Similar accounts cover the family as a whole and often other groups of birds (genera, subfamilies, etc.) Trollope repeatedly stresses the importance of basing captive conditions on knowledge of the birds' natural behavior and habitat, and notes the converse benefits that studies of many species in the wild can receive by close observation of captive birds.

Beyond nit-picking, one can find few faults in this book. Trollope is a little too inclined to lapse into climatic conditions in southern England in a book intended for wider distribution when he discusses care of the birds, and the reader must keep in mind that "first breeding", "few known

breeding records", etc. generally refers to breeding in captivity, not in natural conditions. His reference to an avian disorder as probably analogous to that of animals (p.33) unfortunately implies that birds are not animals. The only error of substance that I noted was his description of the range of the House Finch omitting the well established and expanding eastern population. Although he regards taxonomic controversy as a subject "avoided by all sensible people . . . just as they avoid pestilence, poverty and death" (p.127), Trollope supplies alternate avicultural and "ornithological" names for most species, and generally uses the most current name accepted by ornithologists, Virginian Cardinal being among the few exceptions. Reference to "temperature zone" birds (p.76) was the only typographical error of note, and although the author is inconsistent in use of literature citations, the book includes a large number of sources.

Martin K. McNicholl

**Distribution of Oklahoma birds.** D. Scott Wood and Gary D. Schnell. 1984. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. xxi + 209 pp. \$14.95.

The bulk of this paperback book is a series of maps showing the distribution by county of all species recorded in Oklahoma more than 5 times since 1900. Two species are treated per page, with a calendar bar below the map indicating times of occurrence, and letter symbols indicating state status. A five-page section at the end of the book briefly discusses one extirpated and 3 extinct species, and outlines records for 54 "accidental" species, including a banding record for White-throated Swift. An index of English and Latin names adds to the utility of the book. Avian researchers and environmental consultants in Oklahoma and surrounding states will find this book indispensable, while visiting "birders" can determine at a glance where and when to look for whatever species they seek.

Martin K. McNicholl

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# Books

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**Field Guide to the Birds of North America.** Shirley L. Scott (Editor). 1983. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C. 464pp. \$13.95 + \$3.00 postage and handling.

The newest one-volume guide to North American birds is the most comprehensive to date, and in general the most accurate. No previous guide covers as wide an array of races, distinct morphs, hybrids, introduced exotics and accidentals. As such, this guide, the first to use all the 1983 A. O. U. check-list names, will serve both beginners and veterans well.

Introductory sections covering nomenclature, plumages, voice, behavior, abundance, habitat, maps, and various aids to birdwatching occupy the first 17 pages, after which the bulk of the text describes and illustrates the birds in approximate check-list order. Exceptions include the juxtaposition of cranes with herons, the placement of diurnal raptors and gallinaceous birds between the water birds and other land birds, and various intra-family groupings obviously intended to place similar looking birds together. Text faces plates, with range maps along the left margin, so that most information on a given species is together. Additional flight plates for ducks, shorebirds, gulls and hawks are generally cross-referenced in the text. Descriptions often include habitat and behavioral features useful for identification. Although names are current, recent older names and former taxonomic groupings are often mentioned.

Continuing changes in bird distribution and the proliferation of publications on new insights into variation in plumage make a comprehensive, complete guide to a whole continent virtually impossible and rapidly outdated. An in-depth examination of the book reveals numerous minor flaws - primarily concerning generalizations or slightly outdated ranges. The latter may seem too localized for a field guide, but they are covered well for some species, poorly for others. The illustrations range from "wooden" or misshapen drawings to real works of art. In general, colors are good, but glossy blues and greens are often too vivid, at least for usual viewing. Statements such as "expanding in the east", "declining in the west", etc. may soon be out of date, and should probably have been avoided in a field guide or modified to indicate a time period. Specialists in various groups and areas of the continent will find many minor errors or omissions. A few that I noted follow: Western Grebe chicks, at least in some areas, have a reddish bald spot on their crowns; Pied-billed Grebes are admittedly *usually* not gregarious, but this is not always true; the plate on the bill of breeding adult American White

Pelicans is not always present; Yellow-crowned Night Herons are casual in many states and provinces outside their usual range in addition to California; breeding populations of Sandhill Cranes are also found in Manitoba and coastal British Columbia; although there are very recent nest records of Whooping Cranes in the Alberta portion of Wood Buffalo National Park, most nest in the Northwest Territories portion; although staining is mentioned for cranes, it is not indicated for swans or Snow Geese, both of which are often heavily stained; the very useful difference between Ross's and Snow Geese in the shape of the bill/face junction is illustrated well, but not mentioned in the text; the text for Snowy Plover (p.104) does not mention the flight illustration; the statement that Little Gulls are "now breeding around Great Lakes" is more accurate than the illustration, which shows Lake Superior only, whereas they have nested along Lakes Erie, Huron and Ontario; the head of Cooper's Hawk in flight is much too small; *Helimaster constantii* is labeled Plain-capped Starthroat in the text, Plain-capped Hummingbird in the accompanying plate; the Northern Bearded Tyrannulet is compared with the Ruby-crowned Kinglet under the tyrannulet but not the kinglet although a similar comparison between the kinglet and the similarly range-restricted Hutton's Vireo is done from the perspective of both species; the similarity between Hutton's Vireo and the west coast race of the Solitary is not stressed adequately; American Dippers show white on their eyelids; and the habitat of Black-throated Gray Warblers includes thick, mixed forest, at least on Vancouver Island. I noted numerous small omissions in range, too minor to list here.

These points are all small details in an ever-changing understanding of North America's birds. This constant pattern of change was illustrated markedly to me while I was reading the book. I well recall my confusion over "stick-pins" on Savannah Sparrows around Winnipeg in my early years of birdwatching, and was pleased to see that this guide mentions that some populations have this feature. But while reading the book on Prince Edward Island I found three singing male Lincoln's Sparrows, all on one farm, with stick-pins. The guide does not mention this, and in many years of watching them migrate through Winnipeg, nest in northern Saskatchewan and southwestern Alberta, and more recently migrate through Ontario, I have never before seen a Lincoln's with a stick-pin.

In short, this guide is not the last word on North America bird identification, but is the best effort yet.

Martin K. McNicholl