

1987

Books

North American Bird Bander

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Recommended Citation

North American Bird Bander (1987) "Books," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol12/iss1/6>

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Arizona Wetlands and Waterfowl. David E. Brown. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. 169 pp. \$24.95.

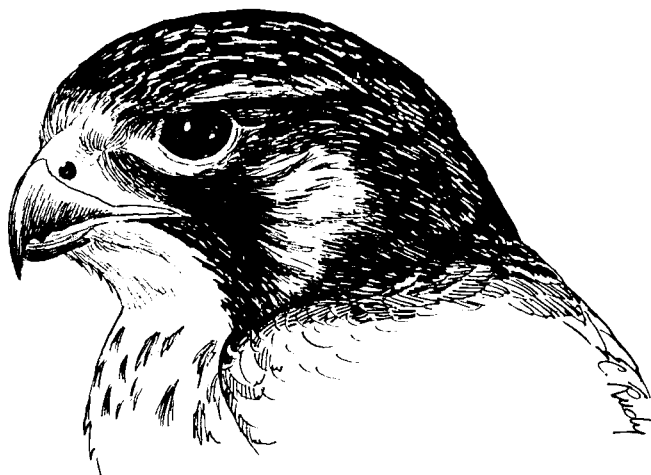
This is a very readable coverage of much of what is known about habitats and waterbirds that many would not associate with the arid U.S. southwest. Considerable basic biology concerning the Anatidae, their taxonomy, anatomy, foods and diseases are summarized, stressing what is known specifically for Arizona. Criteria for ascertaining sex and age are explained well and illustrated.

The state's wetlands are discussed and illustrated by many excellent black-and-white photographs. Much use is made of 30-plus years of research by biologists from the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and various universities. The role of banding in waterfowl management is covered well, and the results of in-state and foreign banding are presented, along with a series of detailed tables and maps.

Illustrations by Bonnie Morehouse, who wrote an M.S. thesis on the "Mexican" duck in Arizona add much to the beauty of the book. Her black-and-white sketches are outstanding, although the seven full-page color paintings are a bit gaudy and flat. The book is remarkably free of typos. One habitat photo labels smartweed (*Polygonum* spp.) as "the emergent aquatic plant . . . waterseed (*Anacharis canadensis*)."

All in all, the book is an excellent buy at \$24.95. The author and the publisher are commended for producing such a thorough, up to date work. Everyone interested in waterfowl or southwestern birds will want a copy.

Ronald A. Ryder



The Bird with the Silver Bracelet/An Essay on Bird-banding. Erma J. Fisk. 1986. Arey's Pond Press, South Orleans, Mass. 27 pp. \$1.50.

This delightful booklet is a somewhat rambling, chatty introduction to bird banding by veteran bander, "Jonnie" Fisk. In keeping with its intended audience of the general public, detailed instructions on how to report a banded bird are placed on the back cover. The text outlines briefly the history of banding, the only topic covered beyond a North American scope, then provides the reader with examples of the functions of banding, methods of capture, such findings as migration routes, winter ranges, longevity and life history details, the role of color-marking and telemetry, the work of observatories, and the role of banding in reintroduction projects. The easy flow of the text is accompanied by pleasant line drawings, rendered by Louise Russell.

There are few outright errors, although the phrase "animals and birds" (p.25) implies that birds are not animals, and both arithmetic and logic will tell the reader that the Lesser Yellowlegs' average flight speed on migration is 384 miles per day, not per hour (p.19). The statement (p. 8) that birds' legs do not change in size is not strictly true, and there is even a published method on determining ages of dead birds by examining growth rings on their legs. While such growth is not usually important to banders, old male Blue Grouse have been known to outgrow their band size, and become lame in extreme cases. The word "duck" appended to Pintail on p. 6 implies that the statement refers only to females, as "duck" is not part of the English name of this species. Inclusion of a few basic sources and the addresses of the major banding associations would have carried the booklet's main objective of introducing the public to banding one step further.

"Jonnie" Fisk is to be congratulated on producing a first-rate introductory overview of banding that will serve both to introduce newcomers to the subject and provide banders with a nice precis of their chosen activity.

Martin K. McNicholl

Note added in proof: The flight speed of the yellowlegs was corrected in the third printing. MKM

Bluebirds, Their Daily Lives & How to Attract and Raise Bluebirds. Tina & Curtis Dew, and R.B. (Reber) Layton. 1986. Nature Books Publishers, Jackson, Miss. 39211. 212 pp. \$12.95 hard cover, \$9.95 soft cover.

When I first glanced through the index of this one I thought "here is a book that should be interesting to read, and a good addition to anyone's book shelf." Reading it from cover to cover showed how wrong the first impression was!

The first 108 pages are copies of letters from the Dews to the Laytons, depicting a year's life cycle of the bluebirds in their backyard. The personal thoughts and "tidbits" would have been better omitted. The authors state in the "Preface" that this is a book for "the layman," but this is no excuse for misleading information and omissions.

More space should have been given to other ways of eliminating the ever present House Sparrow. All bluebird trail operators know that House Sparrows will appropriate the nests of other birds and will enter occupied houses, fight off the adult bluebirds, kill the young and eject them from the box. Male House Sparrows become "fixed" on their chosen sites and will persist unless removed. I was very dismayed to see the Huber sparrow trap included because the book goes to the general public and not everyone who uses such traps is on hand to monitor their use. This trap is made of plywood and totally closed when it has caught a bird, making survival on a very hot day possible for only a very short time. Thus, the trap user must be on hand to let out any desirable birds caught. Almost 6 pages including pictures and drawings are devoted to Huber's Trap, while only one page with one drawing is given to "How to Use a Sparrow Trapping Cage." This cage works on the same principal as the various "have-a-heart" type traps on the market today. It does not harm those birds trapped inside and its heavy gauge galvanized wire allows plenty of air circulation. Insufficient attention was paid to the fact that ALL traps can become death traps unless in the hands of knowledgeable people who can identify properly our avian species!

The chapter on "The Threat of Predators" was also lacking and not broad enough in its information. It does contain instructions for three predator guards that are valuable additions to nesting boxes. However, there is no information about repelling snakes. The authors state . . . "The most likely predators are: squirrels, raccoons, o'possums, house cats, porcupines and sometimes snakes, usually non-poisonous type." I caution any reader to NOT put your hand into a nest box of any kind thinking that non-poisonous snakes are the only type that take over nest boxes; if you do, be prepared for a quick ride to the nearest doctor or emergency room! This reviewer has personal correspondence from various trail operators plus personal

experiences with Cooperhead and Cotton Mouth Snakes in nest boxes. There is no excuse for treating this subject so lightly. Flying Squirrels are another problem not mentioned. They frequently prey on young bluebirds.

Information on proper habitat for bluebirds is non-existent, another oversight. Many people put up boxes in unsuitable habitat and become upset when all they attract are House Sparrows. This book missed a good opportunity of educating laymen on habitat suitable for bluebirds rather than House Sparrows.

A little research by the authors on the migration of the bluebird would have revealed some very interesting facts for inclusion. Eastern Bluebirds have been banded in Indiana and recovered in Kentucky and Alabama; banded in Manitoba and recovered in Texas; banded in Michigan and recovered in Florida, Alabama, Louisiana; banded in Minnesota and recovered in Texas and Mississippi, to cite but a few of the 1,667 recoveries between 1922 and 1984. A summary of the banding results published annually in many local bluebird trail reports would have added substantially to the credibility and usefulness of the book.

In summation: this book leaves much to be desired and other than the letters written about above, there is very little that is new and very little that has not been printed before elsewhere! In my 35 years of reviewing bird and nature books, this is the first time I have encountered a book that I consider little more than a glorified advertising campaign for the North American Bluebird Society. Pass this one by folks, you'll do yourself a favor.

Mrs. Roger W. Foy

Identification, Molts, Plumages, Weights and Measurements

Reliability of ageing Razorbills. W. J. R. De Wijs. 1985. *Seabird* 8:58. -Jac. Obrechstr., 71-IV 1071 KJ Amsterdam, Netherlands.-(A check of 20 breeding birds, several banded previously, showed that although number of bill ridges tends to increase with age, birds up to 9 years old may still possess only one groove. Thus the use of groove number to distinguish between adults and subadults is unreliable.) MKM

Patterns of seasonal weight variation in waders on the Wash. C. Johnson. 1985. *Ring. & Migr.* 6:19-32. -Natl. Mus. Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF1 3NP Wales. -(An analysis of monthly mean weights for 10 shorebird species, including Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Sanderling and Dunlin, at an important molting and wintering area in Great Britain.) RCT