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## Books

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## Identification Guide to North American Passerines.

Peter Pyle, Steve N. G. Howell, Robert P. Yunick and David F. DeSante. 1987. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, Calif. x + 273 pp. \$19.50 + postage and handling (\$2.00 in U.S.A.; \$3.00 elsewhere).

Unlike most identification guides, this book is directed primarily at identification in the hand. It is patterned after a similar, widely-acclaimed guide by Lars Svensson on European passerines, now in its third (1984) edition. Although Merrill Wood (1969) published a guide to sex and age determination of some eastern North American species and the Western Bird Banding Association has published numerous "worksheets" on individual western species or species groups from time to time, nobody has previously published a comprehensive guide to this continent's passerines at this level of detail. In total, the book treats 277 species and 19 additional well defined subspecies. A few primarily Eurasian species, such as Siberian Tit, Arctic Warbler and Northern Wheatear that nest in Alaska, the Yukon and/or the Northwest Territories are omitted, as are such highly localized introduced species as Eurasian Skylark and Crested Mynah. Quite simply, this book represents the single most important publication for North American banders in many years, and will also prove invaluable to museum workers and advanced birdwatchers.

The 26-page introduction covers the scope of the work, bird topography, and details of methods of identification and age and sex determination. I agree with other reviewers that this section is generally written well and should be studied in detail by all banders. As pointed out by Wallace (1987), however, some parts of the section on skulling, especially concerning dates, are appropriate to only some parts of the continent, and can be misleading. Parkes (1988) has also noted a few errors in terminology that should be corrected in future editions. Although the paper by Wolfson on using the cloacal protuberance to assess breeding condition of males is cited, the more detailed work of Salt (1954) on this structure is not. Wood's (1969) guide was certainly appropriate to cite as the first attempt at a work of this kind, but the revision by Wood and Beimborn (1981) would have been a more appropriate basic reference source for the detailed species accounts.

The species accounts form the bulk of the book (pp. 29-256) and are generally thorough. The authors have included most of the relevant literature, and have obviously included large amounts of unpublished data. A general summary preceeds the accounts for each family, and some problem groups, such as *Empidonax* flycatchers. Each species account consists of a four-letter code, the AOU number, band size, a

section on similar species, and sections on molt, skull, age, sex and references. Many are illustrated with clear diagrams and occasionally tables. During two winters of testing in the field in Cuba, I found the book very helpful in determining age and sex of many of the North American migrants that we handled. As pointed out by Wallace (1987), however, measurements of wing chords that help distinguish sex in some species were not always easy to compare, and as pointed out by Albert E. Conway (pers. comm. 1988), the binding is such that the book is sometimes difficult to keep open at the page in use, especially if one hand is occupied with a bird. My companions and I also found that decisions on feather shape and even color were not always as simple to make as implied, and I agree with Mulvihill and Leberman (1988) that these techniques require considerable experience before they can be used with confidence. Perhaps of greater importance, C. Stuart Houston (pers. comm. 1988) has pointed out that the guide does not emphasize the fact that many of the determinations that can be made with the help of this guide are not yet acceptable by the bird-banding authorities in Ottawa and Washington. Thus, banders are encouraged to attempt as precise age and sex determination as possible, but must be careful on how these are reported on their banding schedules.

While substantive errors and omissions appear to be few, many of the criteria used are bound to vary geographically, and much more data are needed to assess their validity in all parts of the range of many species. One purpose of the guide is to encourage such studies, and I hope that *North American Bird Bander* will soon contain numerous assessments of the criteria offered for selected species. A number of errors in measurements, band size and caption labels already published by Pyle (1988) should be used to correct the text before using the book in the "field". Parkes (1988) has also discussed problems with specific details concerning Acadian Flycatcher, Northwestern Crow, Black-capped versus Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Paruline juvenal plumages and Hooded Oriole which all banders of these species should note. Some additional points not made by Parkes (1988) and Pyle (1988) follow. As noted by Parkes (1988) a caution that Townsend's and Hermit Warblers hybridize at the junction of their breeding ranges would have been appropriate (see Morrison and Hardy 1983), as would similar cautions for Cave and Barn Swallows in parts of Texas (Martin 1980 and references therein) and Eastern and Mountain Bluebirds in the prairie provinces (Rounds and Munro 1982 and references therein). Less frequent hybrids could also be listed somewhere, either under the species involved or in a table or appendix. The Fairfield and Shirokoff paper on kinglets, published in a very localized

journal is more accessible as reprinted in *Ontario Bird Banding* 17(3):27-30, 1980. Additional useful references concerning identification would have included Dunn (1981) on female bluebirds and Hamel and Gauthreaux (1982) on age/sex distinctions in Bachman's Warbler (should anybody ever catch one!) The Houston reference cited under Common Redpoll should also have been listed under Hoary Redpoll. Bicknell's race of Gray-cheeked Thrush of New England is also banded during migration in southern Ontario and has recently been found nesting in the Maritimes. The banding manual lists the AOU numbers of Western Palm Warbler as 672.0 and Yellow Palm Warbler as 672.9, the opposite of the listing in this guide. Although the preferred band size for Evening Grosbeak is 1A, some individuals in western populations require size 2 bands (McNicholl 1977a,b), and the band size was accordingly altered to 1A-2 in the 1980 edition of the banding manual. Other examples of such geographic variation should be sought for the next edition.

A major flaw in the guide concerns the four-letter species code. Atlas coordinators are already familiar with the problems posed by such species as Bank and Barn Swallows, Cedar Waxwing and Cerulean Warbler and Black-throated Gray and Black-throated Green Warblers to the code concept. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service compounded the problem by issuing two continent-wide lists of codes, one for banders and the other for cooperators of the Breeding Bird Survey. C. Stuart Houston (pers. comm. 1988) has found that the codes for 85 species (12.7%) on both lists differ, and the guide under review adds to the confusion by offering several codes that differ from those issued by the banding authorities. Fortunately, Pyle (1988) has published a detailed list of those that differ, which all readers should use to alter their copies before using them to complete their banding schedules.

Typographical errors and grammatical slips are bound to creep into a book of this length, but far too many can be found in this guide. Albert E. Conway (pers. comm. 1988) compiled a long list of these, most of which were later published by Pyle (1988) and will not be repeated here. The most serious proof-reading errors involve missing references. Pyle (1988) has already noted the missing Willoughby reference, but additional omissions are Schaeffer (1968) on p. 64, Laskey (1958) and Olyphant (1977) on p. 67, Parkes and Leberman (1967) on p. 102, Southern (1961) on p. 137, Schaeffer (1974) on p. 171, and Blake (1969b) on p. 191. In addition Robbins *et al.* is cited incorrectly as 1983 twice in the text (p. 75), but correctly as 1986 in the literature cited, Ralph incorrectly as 1976 on p. 221, but correctly as 1975 in the literature cited, and Lamm and Leupke incorrectly

as 1981 on p. 221, correctly as 1982 in the literature cited. Two references in the literature cited (Robbins 1972; Yunick 1977) appear not to have been cited in the text. Dates are missing from Michener and Michener (1951) on p. 263 and Meanley and Bond (1970) on p. 262 and partially missing from Shortt (1951) on p. 267. Spelling mistakes additional to those already noted by Mulvihill and Leberman (1988), Parkes (1988) and Pyle (1988) include Traill's (Table 1), phoebe (twice on p. 42), Bendire's (p. 106), *Pheucticus* (p. 174) and Bullock's (p. 242) in species names, and Fugle (p. 219), Hussell (pp. 14, 34, 60), Sealy (p. 129) and Shirokoff (pp. 90, 259) among names of people, several of these also being spelled correctly elsewhere. "This criteria" (p. 135) is an obvious grammatical slip, while "thru" seems more appropriate to shorthand field notes than to a scientific publication.

In spite of being marred by a large number of typographical and other proof-reading slips, this guide is a *must* component of the banding equipment of anybody who bands passerines in North America and areas in which North American passerines winter or frequent during migration. This volume should be regarded as a workbook to be tested in the preparation of an improved, properly proof-read second edition, preferably available in English, French and Spanish.

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