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Ecology and Conservation of Neotropical Migrant Landbirds

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REVIEW

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Ecology and Conservation of Neotropical Migrant Landbirds.—John M. Hagan III and David W. Johnston (editors). 1992. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington. ISBN 1-56098-140-7 (paper, \$17.95). 52 papers by 94 authors; 576 pages.—Birders and biologists have sounded an alarm that many species of migrants once common in favorite birding spots and research sites seem to have become rarer, or even disappeared, during the last decade. Much scientific attention is being paid to the population trends and ecology of long-distance migrants, and the proceedings of a 1989 symposium represents the most comprehensive compilation of work on the subject. Although some papers may challenge the non-technical reader, several contributions to this volume provide excellent overview discussions of Neotropical migrant bird conservation issues. The text is well-supported by easily understood graphs, tables, and figures.

The book is divided into four sections: Trends in Populations, The Nonbreeding Season, The Breeding Season, and Hemispheric Perspectives. Analyses of Breeding Bird Survey data provide the most comprehensive species-by-species reports of long-term (1966-1988) trends in population levels. Long-term trends are examined by a host of other methods including Breeding Bird Censuses, point and transect counts, weather radar, and mist-net captures along migratory routes. Readers should be warned that if they seek consistent explanations of trends in migrant populations, they should look elsewhere! Several papers provide contradictory information on population trends for several species. These differences may simply reflect natural variation of populations in different regions, but also might be due to differences in statistical and field methodologies used by different scientists. For example, F. James reports that Northern Parula (*Parula americana*) populations in the Southeast have increased in the past two decades, whereas J. Sauer and S. Droege report that eastern U.S. populations have declined significantly during the last ten years but have not changed over the last two decades as a whole.

A large proportion of the papers seeks evidence for population regulation either on the breeding grounds (e.g. via nest predation, cowbird parasitism, insect prey abundance, or weather) or on the nonbreeding grounds (e.g. via habitat destruction). Although most conservationists have assumed that habitat loss influences neotropical migrants on the nonbreeding grounds (through tropical forest deforestation), several authors provide compelling evidence that human-induced habitat changes on North American breeding grounds are also negatively impacting birds. Numerous authors suggest that several migrant species use second growth or agricultural lands to an equivalent or greater degree than primary forests on the wintering ground, further complicating the issue. One limitation of the book is that few papers discuss factors influencing birds on both breeding and wintering grounds or address their migration ecology.

An interesting (and saddening) introduction to the biological and political issues of migrant conservation is given by J. Terborgh. G. Hartshorn offers an excellent summary of the history of tropical deforestation and the land-use options that exist today in the Neotropics. T. Martin argues convincingly for future research on the basic life history of the plethora of poorly-known species, rather than focusing simply on census-based population trends. While many of the authors attempt to summarize the population trends or ecology of Neotropical migrants as a group, they often conclude that only species-specific studies will advance our understanding of this diverse assemblage. Acknowledging that time and funding are short, J. Reed and E. Morton separately introduce intriguing ways of ranking the conservation priorities of migrant species based on natural history features such as rarity, habitat and diet specialization, and sociality. And if you read only one paper, I recommend the final chapter. Written by a group of Latin American scientists, it lists

suggestions on how North Americans can facilitate cooperative research in the tropics, and makes some very pointed and provocative observations about the political and economic realities of tropical conservation, which may make some North American biologists and environmentalists squirm. I recommend this book to all professionals and any natural history aficionados with an interest in the conservation biology of American songbirds.—**Christine Champe**, Department of Wildlife and Range Sciences, 118 Newins-Ziegler Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611.

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