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## The Birdlife of Florida, by Henry M Stevenson And Bruce H Anderson

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## REVIEW

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**The Birdlife of Florida.**—Henry M. Stevenson and Bruce H. Anderson. 1994. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. ISBN 0-8130-1288-0. 892 pages. \$120.00 cloth.—Here it is, the long-awaited *opus magnum* of Henry M. Stevenson! It covers virtually everything you ever wanted to know about Florida birds. And *magnum* it certainly is—710 pages of text covering some 665 species, 168 pages of bibliography (ca. 9,000 titles), 454 numbered species' distribution maps, several tables, an addendum of observations through February 1994, and an index. Henry spent at least 30 years gathering information for this work, as he laboriously and personally gleaned data from museum specimens all over the country, from published accounts, and from his and others' field notes. Few nooks or crannies in the state escaped his never-ending search for birds, whether through binoculars or over the barrel of his collecting gun. His correspondence with dozens of professional and amateur ornithologists must have been voluminous. For about six years, he worked with his coauthor to complete this extremely valuable reference book. Their final totals for the number of species found in Florida are: 484 accredited species, 2 extinct, 22 established exotics, 46 hypothetical (of probable natural occurrence), and 135 non-established exotics.

Species accounts include, first of all, sections on **Distribution** (worldwide, North America, or New World) and **Florida Status**. Probably the most useful section in the species accounts, and one that will likely receive the most attention, is that of **Florida Status**. Herein, the authors begin with quite useful summary statements about the bird's occurrence in the state, then document virtually every record that they could find for the species' occurrence in Florida. These include museum specimens, published accounts, and sightings. Such records are usually presented in great detail, are carefully and critically evaluated, and sometimes are challenged. Extreme dates of occurrence and maxima of individuals seen, when known for specific sites, are also presented. Checking the accuracy and completeness of all species' records is beyond the scope of this review; that evaluation must be left to future researchers.

Before reading the section on **Relative abundance**, users must read the methods section carefully before trying to understand the use of decimals to compare abundances at different sites. Comparisons of early (1910-1935) and recent (1951-1982) Christmas Bird Counts suggest winter population trends over the years, and data from Breeding Bird Surveys (1966 to 1984) provide trends for breeding birds. Although overly wordy, the sections on **Migration** (numbers, dates, places), **Breeding** (nest sites, eggs), and **Haunts and Habits** (preferred habitats, behavior, foods, vocalizations) are well prepared and provide easy reading. Many people will appreciate the section dealing with **Problems of Identification**, with its special focus on difficult-to-distinguish forms such as *Empidonax* flycatchers, shorebirds, and birds of prey. Crucial points of difference seem to be based on Henry's many years of field experiences. Also useful to some readers is the section on subspecific **Variations** for those polytypic species breeding in Florida. Here, the senior author gives his views on the acceptability of certain forms in the state and, usually without explanation, occasionally deviates from "standard" A.O.U. nomenclature. I also appreciate the authors' efforts to identify **Adverse Factors** such as predation, parasitism, and biocide concentrations. Some readers, like myself, will wonder about the meanings of "low" or "high" or "highest" levels of pesticides (compared to what?) and the relationship between pesticide concentrations and the viability of an individual bird. Finally, in the species accounts are pertinent, valuable **References** to which the reader is steered for further reading or confirmatory information.

Accompanying each of the 484 accredited species is a distribution map in which seasons of occurrence, breeding and specimen records are indicated for each county.

When subspecies have been identified for species breeding in Florida, approximate boundaries of the subspecies are so indicated. A separate designation should have been given for the Florida Keys; an out-of-state visitor probably will not know whether the Keys are in Dade or Monroe county.

I was disappointed to find less than a page on physiography (ecology) and virtually nothing on history of ornithology. Surely a book of this magnitude should have included appropriate sections on these very important subjects which are intimately related to bird distribution. The large increase of birdwatchers in the state over the past several decades must have affected our increasing knowledge about bird distribution.

Painstaking, aggressive, professional editing by an experienced ornithologist would have greatly improved the quality and reduced the size of this book. Here are some reasons why.

Lengthy descriptions of worldwide distribution should have been greatly condensed or deleted. Who among the users of this book needs to know that Ruddy Turnstones probably breed in Mackenzie, that Merlins winter in Mongolia, or that White-faced Ibises occur in Argentina? Paragraphs of ordinal and family characteristics should have been deleted. Who among the usual users of this book on Florida birds needs to know that passerines have a bilaminate tarsus, that falcons are anisodactyl, or that potoos have "teeth" on the maxillary tomium? Deletion of these out-of-place materials would have saved pages and, along with more stringent editing as indicated elsewhere, might have reduced the cost of the book.

Misspellings and typographical errors are frequent: scientific names (*Casmerodias*, *Caladris*, *[I]leuoptera*), common name (Kitiwake), and authors' names (Imhoff for Imhof, French for french). Inconsistencies abound: imm. vs. im.; FL vs. Fla.; & vs. and; one vs. 1; pounds vs. lb.; use of et al. vs. spelling out all authors' names; one species showing a "definite decrease" vs. "slight decrease." Confusing adjectives are frequently used without explanations: a specimen was "purportedly taken," "largely undocumented report," "almost surely erroneous," "unsubstantiated." Ontario is presented as a state. I have never heard of the word "avians" as a noun referring to birds. Undocumented, puzzling, or incorrect statements are found, for example, that larger owls prey on screech owls in Florida, that Golden Eagles have speeds up to 200 mph, and that PCBs are pesticides (they are not). In many instances food preferences given in the text are undocumented (e.g., Double-crested Cormorant, Anhinga) so that the reader must only guess that birds in Florida consume those specific foods.

In a work of this magnitude, even the most careful author/compiler is bound to miss references. Among missing items are most graduate theses and dissertations either from Florida colleges and universities or from out of state but covering some aspect of Florida ornithology.

Finally, the careless inclusion by the junior author of a Commentary alleging problems with one old egg collection is clearly out of place. From flimsy, non-scientific, second-hand inferences, Anderson illogically warns readers to beware of Gould's catalog records by using such unwarranted, pejorative, and inaccurate phrases as "purportedly collected." Even though a specimen might not be found today, a precise catalog entry a century ago is still an acceptable record and does not require "validation" or "verification." That Commentary, itself lacking in credibility, should never have been published here because it mars the integrity of the book.

Clearly, **Birdlife of Florida** is the result of the most ambitious undertaking in Florida by a single man since the publication of **Florida Bird Life** by Arthur Howell in 1932. It is an exceptionally valuable compilation of records for birds found in the state. Although obvious editorial problems occur, the book is essential for anyone interested in an up-to-date treatment of Florida's birds whether they be serious birders, professionals or out-of-state visitors. Its high cost, however, will likely reduce sales.—**David W. Johnston**, 5219 Concordia Street, Fairfax, Virginia 22032.