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Books

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Books

Shorebirds. An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World. Peter Hayman, John Marchant and Tony Prater. 1986. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. 412 pp. 88 plates. Hardcover, \$35.00

The guide book business has proliferated greatly in recent years; hardly a week passes without another field guide appearing on the book stands. This one is about 6" by 9-1/2", and quite hefty, and not nearly so portable as what we usually think of as a field guide. It is instead, and as the title implies, an identification guide. In the informative introduction there is an explanation of the contents of the species accounts, a short overview of the groups covered, a brief resume of wader conservation, comments on how to study waders, and a two-page note on the plates that provides eloquent testimony of the extreme care used in their production. The introduction is followed by a series of plates with range maps and comments on plumage given on the facing page. These, in turn, are followed by the species accounts, nine tables making detailed comparisons among shorebirds especially difficult to identify, and a relatively brief but valuable list of references.

The 88 color plates by Peter Hayman are a delight to the eye. They show not only lateral views of the birds, often of as many as four different plumages, but also numerous smaller figures, usually of birds in flight, and sometimes details of head and tail pattern. I chose 21 species at random to estimate the depth of coverage per species. The species I selected had on average nine figures devoted to each, highly satisfactory when one considers that many field guides provide no more than one to three figures of each species.

The plates cover all the shorebirds of the world (214 species in 12 families by the authors' account) and include figures for such little known species as Cox's Sandpiper (*Calidris paramelanotos*), first described from Australia in 1982. Four plates depict a single species, five show four species and the remaining plates are about equally divided between showing two (40 plates) or three species (37). Two other plates compare the juvenal and breeding plumages of eight species of calidridine sandpipers.

The individual birds are drawn most pleasingly. Some plates captured the 'jizz' of the birds most admirably. I particularly liked the side view of the Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) in winter plumage. The latter is so clearly at rest that one expects it momentarily to close its eye and fall asleep. My criticisms of the plates are few. A few of the postures are a little awkward; and in a few instances, I thought the artist

over-emphasized the scaling of the feathers. These are exceedingly minor cavils, however, as the art work overall ranges from good to very good indeed and is consistently superior to that found in most other guides.

The species accounts occupy the latter half of the book and contain sections on identification, voice, distinctions of age and sex, races, measurements and references. Usually about half the text is devoted to the sections on identification and description, the former providing comments on distinguishing the species discussed from others; the latter providing more detailed descriptions of various plumages.

These species accounts present a great deal of information in a limited space but are not as great a success as are the plates. Comments in the section on description often repeat in less detail information given opposite the plates. Whether the species has any known races is stated and the distinctions among the races are given briefly. This section could have been strengthened considerably. I found one comment that "Geographical variation is apparently small" particularly frustrating and feel that the section should have included at least one sentence explaining this tantalizing statement. The section on measurements usually presents data (in the metric system) for length, wing, bill, and tarsus and occasionally for tail, fork of tail, and bill depth. Unfortunately, no sample size is given for any of these, nor is there any indication, when the species has races varying in size, of which form was measured. This makes the measurement sections less valuable than they could have been.

One crucial question about the book remains. Will it help you identify shorebirds? Yes, indeed. But more importantly, it will quickly show you just how difficult the identification of these perplexing little birds may be. Hopefully, this book will lead to more careful identifications of the "rarities" that bird watchers now find with some regularity.

This superb book is one of the most delightful books to cross my desk in recent years. Its coverage of the shorebirds of the world is so extensive and so admirable that I would recommend it not only as a guide to identification but also as a reference and a welcome addition to the library of anyone interested in birds. I have rarely been as enthusiastic about a bird book as this one. Buy it. You won't be disappointed.

Roger B. Clapp

Reprinted in slightly modified form from the fall 1988 issue of *Naturalist Review*.

Books

The Facts on File Field Guide to North Atlantic Shorebirds. Richard J. Chandler. 1989. Facts on File. 208 pp. Hardcover, \$19.95.

This slim volume subtitled, "A photographic guide to the waders of western Europe and eastern North American," covers 72 species of shorebirds, largely those that breed or are fairly frequent migrants in the North Atlantic. A few vagrants are also included for comparison to similar species. Among the latter are both Rufous and Long-toed Stints (*Calidris ruficollis* and *C. subminuta*), but the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*C. acuminata*) does not appear here although it has been recorded from both the eastern and western Atlantic coasts.

The book begins with a short introduction and some general remarks on the species covered (22 pp.), a section on plumages and molts (10 pp.), and one on photographing shorebirds (10 pp.). Most of the book (152 pp.) consists of species accounts that usually include a page of text with color photographs on facing pages. The text for each species account contains a paragraph on identification, descriptions of different plumages and call notes, a brief paragraph on status, habitat and distribution, usually a one-line comment on racial variation, a short paragraph on similar species, and occasionally a reference.

The species accounts are uneven with more photos not necessarily for species that are more difficult to identify. A large proportion (52%) of the 220 color photographs were taken by Chandler, which may account for some of the disparity. For example, 27 of the 35 photographs of the six species with more than four photographs were taken by Chandler. This has the virtue of presenting previously unpublished material; but in some instances, the author may have been carried away by pride in his work. For example, there are seven color photographs of Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*); four of these are of summer birds and some are certainly extraneous.

Some features seem like useless padding. The comments on racial variation sometimes indicate only that other races are unlikely to occur, sometimes mentioning other races, but usually state that no races are recognized. The references, occupying but two pages, seem more of an afterthought than an attempt to provide useful additional information. These citations are taken almost entirely from European (largely British) sources and consist mainly of what might be called "birding" literature.

Following the species accounts is an 11-page section of 52 black-and-white photographs of shorebirds in flight. They

are of considerably lesser quality than the ones in color. Fully 60 percent of these photographs were taken by the author. Pictures of some species (e.g., Northern Pied Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*), Northern Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*)) hardly seem necessary for identification. It would have been better to include more photographs of species for which flight characters are important in identification.

The color photographs are largely very good and provide the greatest interest for North American readers, because they illustrate a variety of species (e.g., Little Stint, *Calidris minuta*, and various tringine sandpipers) that may occur as vagrants along the U.S. east coast. The book also gives a nice series of photographs of American Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica dominica*) and Pacific Golden Plover (*P. d. fulva*) here treated as distinct species.

Such a book inevitably invites comparison with Peter Hayman, John Marchant, and Tony Prater's Shorebirds: Identification Guide to the Waders of the World (see accompanying review). Chandler's book costs \$20, whereas the nearly 400-page Hayman, Marchant and Prater book costs \$35. Shorebirds covers all the shorebirds of the world, shows more plumages, has better references, more detailed information on geographic variation, and generally considerably more detailed descriptions of plumages. In other words, much of what Chandler does in his book has already been done better by someone else. The Facts on File book is worth having, but almost solely for its photographs of exotic and vagrant species. The book would have been more valuable with even more photographs and considerably less text.

Roger B. Clapp

Reprinted in slightly modified form from the winter 1990 issue of *Naturalist Review*.

Change of Address for author:

Bird-Banding: Experiencing the Scientific Method by Bill Hilton, Jr., 1432 Devinney Road, York, South Carolina 29745. \$5.

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