

1997

## News, Notes, Comments

North American Bird Bander

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**MANY FIELD BIOLOGIST INTERNS** are needed to operate constant effort mist-netting and banding (MAPS) stations in Washington, Oregon, California, Texas, Kansas, Missouri, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Internships begin **21 April, 23 April or 1 May** and end 8 August, depending on location. Applicants should have substantial birding experience; internships include an intensive, two-week training course in the above-mentioned monitoring techniques. Applicants with good field vehicles are especially needed. A per diem reimbursement, ranging from approximately \$438 to \$617 per month (depend-

ing on location), and housing provided. For further information and application materials, interested persons should contact

**Eric Feuss,  
The Institute for Bird Populations  
P.O. Box 1346  
Point Reyes Station, CA 94956  
(415-663-1436; FAX 415-663-9482,  
e:mail IBPSTAFF@COMPUSERVE.COM)**

Please pass this announcement on to anyone who might be interested in such a position.

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## Books

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### **A Guide to the Identification and Natural History of the Sparrows of the United States and Canada.**

J. Rising. 1996. Academic Press, New York. 365 pp., including 27 color plates. \$39.95 U.S. (hard cover), \$19.95 U.S. (paperback).

When I was a graduate student, another birder once asked me what I was studying for my dissertation. "Sparrows," was my answer. The birder looked at me quizzically for a moment, then responded, "Well, I guess somebody has to study them."

The fact that we were surrounded by the colorful and exotic avifauna of southwestern Arizona probably helped fuel my companion's confusion. Why study sparrows when such fantastic birds as trogons, orioles and hummingbirds are around? In fact, sparrows form an excellent group to study, especially for banders. They provide several logistical advantages—they usually remain close to the ground, where they can be caught in mist nets, they eat seeds that help lure them into traps, and they nest in locations where their young can be banded. For an ecologist, there are other plusses—wintering sparrows eat food (seeds) that can be quantified more easily than other kinds of foods (what do swifts eat, anyway?); many sparrows show one style of social organization in the breeding season (territoriality) and another in the winter (flocking); and since some species in the southern U.S. are permanent residents, researchers do not need to consider what is happening to their wintering habitat in Guatemala,

Jamaica or some such place. Sparrows as a group, however, present two major problems: many species are hard to observe, and most are dull and primarily brown, making identification a pain, compared to their more brightly colored and visible relatives.

These two problems would be reduced with a good field guide to the sparrows and their allies. This must be the golden age for sparrow-lovers, because no less than three books covering the identification of sparrows, finches and their relatives have been published in the past few years, including those by Clements et al. (1993) covering finches and goldfinches, Byers et al. (1995) on sparrows and buntings of the World, and Rising's 1996 subject of this review. Rising covers many of the same species as Byers et al. (1995), but with a greater emphasis on North American species. All three books have fine sets of color plates illustrating the species in detail. The main question I sought to answer in reviewing Rising's book was, "Is this book valuable for banders?"

The organization of Rising's book is straightforward. A beginning set of chapters introduces the format for the book, and answers the question, "What are sparrows?" A set of line drawings covers the topography of a "typical" sparrow, defining morphological features of a standing or flying bird. The "What are sparrows?" chapter includes an introduction to the conservation and taxonomic relationships of the group, among other topics.