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Books

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Books

THE BIRDS OF THE WESTERN PALEARCTIC, CONCISE EDITION. D.W. Snow and C. M. Perrins. 1998. Oxford University Press, Oxford, U.K. Hard cover, two-volume boxed set, 1694 pp. plus indices. ISBN 0-19-854099-X. \$280.00 U.S.

British ornithologists lead the world in organizing knowledge about the birds of their region. Earlier in this decade, they completed the last of a nine-volume opus, **Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa**, also known as **Birds of the Western Palearctic** or BWP, covering breeding, wintering, migrant, and "accidental" species of that region. Not content to rest on their laurels, the group of authors and illustrators has now produced a two-volume concise edition. This work condenses the information in the nine-volume version, updates it, and adds new material. For instance, recent research on the migration of Blackcaps is included.

The attractive concise edition covers 926 species pictured on 594 plates, including 230 new ones. The plates are placed with or close to the corresponding accounts, rather than grouped separately as in the nine-volume set. The 1008 pages in volume 1 cover non-passerines, while volume 2 (686 pages) includes passerine birds. The concise edition contains 80 more species than the nine-volume set.

Both versions group information about each species into the following topics: field characteristics, habitat, distribution, population, movements, food, social pattern and behavior, voice, and breeding. The full set contains sonograms, and its accounts are considerably longer, e.g., 11¼ pages on Black-winged Stilt are condensed to 2½ pages in the concise edition. Maps in the concise edition are large and easy to understand. Illustrations are attractive, and show the birds in more than one plumage.

Unfortunately, the many references found throughout the text of the nine-volume work have been eliminated from the concise version, leaving only a list of new references grouped at the beginning of volume 1.

The fascination for many banders on this side of the Atlantic will be in comparing the avifauna of the western Palearctic with that of North America. The differences in numbers of species within families in the two areas is of interest. The concise edition required 42 pages to cover the 23 larks of their area, compared to one common native breeding lark and one localized introduced species in North America. With wrens the picture is reversed, with many New World species and only one wren (our Winter Wren) in the Old World.

For banders in areas where strays from the Old World occur, this set will be an invaluable resource, while the listing of New World species which stray to Europe will fascinate those interested in bird movements. A larger number of "our" birds stray to Europe than one might guess: 21 wood-warbler species, ten sparrows, nine icterids, seven thrushes, and two tanagers have wandered across the Atlantic, while only two species of New World flycatchers are listed: Acadian Flycatcher and Eastern Phoebe.

An intriguing appendix lists proposed changes in English names of some birds listed in these volumes. Some of these affect North American species. Are you ready for Great Northern Loon, American Mourning Dove, and Northern Grey Shrike? And probably the change of all "gray" words to "grey."

Who might consider this set? Ornithological libraries, large and small, will want it as the most current information source on birds of its region. Bird book collectors will find this attractive set hard to resist. For banders with ample budgets who want more information about birds of the western Palearctic than field guides provide, the concise edition is a good starting point. The added and updated text and distribution maps make the concise edition virtually a required purchase for owners of the nine-volume set.

Robert C. Tweit