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## Books

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**Ringing recoveries and colony attendance of Isle of May Guillemots.** M. P. Harris, S. R. Baillie and C. Dudley. 1997. *Seabird* 19:31-39. Inst. Terrestrial Ecol., Hill of Brathens, Banchory, Kincardineshire AB31 4BY, U.K. (Of 275 Common Murres recovered from birds banded on Isle of May, Scotland, between January 1970 and August 1995, 55% were "found dead," 22% found oiled, 20% caught in fishing nests and 3% shot. All shot birds and 71% of birds caught in nets were first-year birds. Most recoveries, analyzed by season and age of bird, were from the North Sea or British Isles, but small numbers were recovered in the Baltic Sea, the Bay of Biscay and the Faroe Islands.) MKM

**Differences in prey species delivered to nestlings by male and female Razorbills *Alca torda*.** R. H. Wagner. 1997. *Seabird* 19:58-59. Dept. Biol., York Univ., North York, Ont. M3J 1P3 (Observations in Wales of nesting pairs in which one or both birds were color-banded showed that sprats comprised 10% of food loads brought to chicks by females, but only 1.6% of loads brought by males.) MKM

Note: Thanks to William R. Clark for the reprint of the 1998 pheasant study by T. Z. Riley *et al.* and to John Miles for copies of two issues of *Harrier* abstracted in this compilation.

MKM = Martin K. McNicholl

## Books

### THE BIRDS OF SONORA

Stephen M. Russell and Gale Monson, illustrated by Ray Harm. 1998. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. Hard cover, 360 pp. \$75.00 U.S.

For many birdwatchers, including this reviewer, the state of Sonora was their first introduction to the ornithology of Mexico, a country of enormous diversity and interest in the Americas, behind only Brazil and Peru in its number of endemic species. Sonora is a roughly triangular state, bounded to the north by Arizona, to the east by the high mountains of Chihuahua and to the west by the Gulf of California. Although at 180,000 square km., it is only one-sixth the size of Ontario, no fewer than 525 species (as compared to about 470 in Ontario) have been recorded. This diversity is due in no small degree to the extraordinarily varied topography and climate of Sonora, encompassing deserts of various types, upland savannahs, tropical deciduous forest, thornscrub and high altitude pine and pine-oak woodlands. The traveller from the United States does not have to journey very far south of the border before encountering families, such as motmots or woodcreepers, not found in the U.S., as well as numerous unfamiliar species.

Such an area is well worthy of its own book. The long-awaited **Birds of Sonora** by Russell and

Monson meets just such a need. The authors are uniquely qualified to undertake this task: Russell was, before retirement, a Professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology of the University of Arizona in Tucson, while Monson, one of the authors of the classic **Birds of Arizona** (1964), is a native Arizonan, who worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The present work is based largely on many thousands of hours spent in the field, over many years, in all areas of the state of Sonora, as well as a thorough review of published and unpublished data from many sources.

The book begins with a useful introduction to the state, starting with some basic geographic notes, a description of the various vegetation types (with color map) and notes on climate and human effects on the Sonoran environment. After a brief glossary and some items of explanation, the book launches into its major component, the species accounts.

Each of the more than 500 species has an individual account, starting with a summary of its status in Sonora (which varies, according to species, from dates and places of the occurrence of rare species to detailed descriptions of geographic and altitudinal distribution of more widespread ones), notes on preferred habitat, and quite frequently other details, such as a

description of nest siting and construction, feeding techniques, etc. So scanty is the literature on many Mexican species that these small items often contain details never published previously; for example, details of the nesting of Spotted Wren, and a record of parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbird, have not, to my knowledge, been documented previously.

For each species, there is a map showing, by different symbols, locations of proven or presumed breeding, transient and winter localities, and points of occurrence of birds outside the normal range. The maps are generally clear and easy to read, although the symbols for vagrant occurrences (fine crosses) are often difficult to locate. While the book is not intended as an identification guide, the text is enlivened by a number of attractive half-tone illustrations by Ray Harm, while the frontispiece by the same artist is a beautiful full-page color illustration of Sonora's most arresting bird, the Black-throated Magpie-Jay.

Although Russell and his long-time collaborator, the late Donald Lamm (to whom the book is dedicated), did considerable banding in the coastal mangroves of Sonora, there is very little reference to banding in the text, and the **Birds of Sonora** cannot be recommended to ornithologists interested only in banding. It most certainly can be recommended, however, to anybody interested in bird distribution, in Mexican birds, or for that matter simply in possessing an authoritative, well-researched and well-written book, attractively produced, for the **Birds of Sonora** is all of these things. Would that the other 30-odd Mexican states could be so treated!

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### **COLORADO BREEDING BIRD ATLAS**

H. E. Kingery, editor. 1998. Colorado Bird Atlas Partnership, Franktown, Colorado. Hardcover, 636 pp. \$34.95 U.S.

Colorado has produced a blockbuster! This big (8 1/2 x 11 inch format, 636 page) volume contains a wealth of information for any bander, birdwatcher or ornithologist living in or near Colorado or interested in its avifauna. Colorado is located where the Great Plains end abruptly at the Rocky Mountains, which then merge into the Great Basin in western Colorado. The resulting wide variety of habitats attracts a broad spectrum of birds. There are more breeding birds in the Colorado atlas than in any other U.S. state atlas yet published.

During 1987-1995, an army of nearly 1,300 atlassers surveyed the 1745 "priority" blocks into which the state was divided. A block is one sixth of a 7.5' topographic map. Thus, the atlas project covered about 17% of the state. This method is practical for overall sampling, but has limitations recognized by the atlas steering committee. For instance, it is difficult to sample the distribution of species breeding in habitats of limited area (alpine tundra) and linear shape (major rivers and streams) accurately because the randomly selected blocks may miss them. The committee also recognized the special problems posed by night birds and early or late nesters. They took measures to ameliorate the difficulties, including some additional sampling.

Besides all the new data a breeding bird atlas project produces, another benefit is to get birders away from their familiar haunts and into previously unexplored areas.

The heart of this volume is the species account section, covering 253 species in two-page profiles, including a large map, a graph of habitat use, and a breeding chronology. The authors include information about habitat, breeding, and distribution. The attractive line drawing with each account shows the bird, and sometimes the nest, in appropriate habitat. Another 11 rare or localized breeding species receive abbreviated treatments. The status of 14 possible breeding species (one of which, Hooded Warbler, was confirmed in 1998) is discussed and historical nesting records for ten additional species are included.

The 30 authors who wrote individual accounts have searched the literature for information, citing 1338 references (listed collectively). The species accounts that we sampled were written well, drawing on both original and secondary sources, including the available *Birds of North America* accounts.

The distribution maps constitute the most fascinating part of the book. The species fall into a variety of patterns, with grassland birds spread over the eastern plains, eastern forest birds spotted in the riparian corridor along the Platte River, montane species spread through the Rockies and some Chihuahuan desert species occupying the canyons and mesas south of the Arkansas River. Some species follow the foothills of the Front Range.

Colorado is known for its wealth of gallinaceous birds; there are 12 species (nine native), each with a unique distribution pattern across the state. Owls are also well represented, with 12 species. Fourteen species of hawks breed in Colorado, as do 18 waterfowl species.

Habitat codes indicate four types of Red Crossbills breeding in Colorado. The atlasers can count themselves lucky that they completed their work before official splits!

Other features of the book include: a 16-page folio of color photos of Colorado habitats, 15 pages of habitat descriptions and changes that have occurred since human settlement, an estimate of the statewide breeding population of each species, and a list of characteristics of each block surveyed.

Some data included in tables (the population estimates and observed cowbird parasitism) might more usefully have been added to the species accounts, grouping all material about a given species in one place. Overall, however, the book is very well organized and presents a voluminous amount of data in an accessible form.

The results have been published in timely fashion by the continuing effort of many of the atlas volunteers. Financial support from a number of sources has kept the price reasonable. The editor and all the volunteers are to be congratulated on a job well done.

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