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Books

North American Bird Bander

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Currently searched journals and their abstractors are:

Alberta Naturalist -MKM
Atlantic Seabirds -MKM
Auk -GAS
Birding -SMS
Birds of Prey Bulletin -MKM
Bluebird -MKM
Blue Jay -MKM
British Columbia Birds -MKM
Bulletin of the British Ornithological Club -KCP
Bulletin of the Southern California Academy of Science -CTC
Canadian Field-Naturalist -MKM
Canadian Journal of Zoology -RAR
Colonial Waterbirds -MKM
Condor -RCT
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Living Bird Quarterly -CIS
North American Birds -MKM
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Prairie Naturalist -MKM
Ringed & Migration -RCT
Safring News -MKM (exchange)
Wader Study Group Bulletin -MKM
Western Birds -RCT
Wildlife Monographs -DMC
Wildlife Society Bulletin -DMC
Wilson Bulletin -DMC

CTC = Charles T. Collins
DMC = Douglas M. Collister
MKM = Martin K. McNicholl
KCP = Kenneth C. Parkes
RAR = Ronald A. Ryder
CIS = Catherine I. Sandell
SMS = Sharon M. Skelly
GAS = Gregory A. Smith
RCT = Robert C. Tweit

Special thanks are due to Robert C. Tweit for abstracting *J. Wildl. Manage.* for several years. As Bob no longer subscribes to that journal, we require a new volunteer abstractor for it. Other journals formerly covered, but for which which we currently lack abstractors, include *Bird Study*, *British Birds*, *Connecticut Warbler*, *Ecological Monographs*, *Ibis*, *Jack-Pine Warbler*, *Kansas Ornithological Society Bulletin*, *Kingbird*, *Loon*, *Ornis Fennica*, *Passenger Pigeon*, *Ring*, and *Science*. Numerous other regional journals appear not to have had abstractors at any time. Some from which the editor has requested copies of specific contributions to abstract in recent issues include *Alabama Birdlife*, *Bird Observer (Massachusetts)*, *Bulletin of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society*, *Iowa Bird Life*, *Journal of Great Lakes Research*, *Journal of the Iowa Academy of Science*, *Meadowlark*, *Michigan Birds & Natural History*, *Migrant*, *Notornis*, *Oriole*, *Raven*, *South Dakota Bird Notes*, *Southwestern Naturalist*, *Stilt* and *Utah Birds*. Readers interested in abstracting any of these or others not listed are invited to write the Literature Editor.

Books

LIFE OF THE FLYCATCHER

Alexander F. Skutch, illustrated by Dana Gardner, 1997. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. Hard cover, xiii + 162 pp. + 16 plates. \$40.00 U.S.

In this book, Central America's veteran nature writer has applied his usual combination of eloquent writing, scientific observation and literature research to the largest bird family "confined to the Americas" and managed to provide an excellent overall summary of what we know to date about this very diverse group of birds.

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Although nobody could provide a comprehensive account of "about 380" species in a book of this length, Skutch weaves his personal observations with those published in books and major journals into a general survey of the life history of these widespread birds.

The book does not provide individual species accounts or accounts of sub-families or other groupings. Rather, a brief preface is followed by eleven topical chapters dealing with "the flycatcher family" (taxonomic placement and species diversity), "food and foraging," "daily life"

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(monogamy, roosting habits in different habitats, migrants vs. permanent residents, bathing and other maintenance behaviors, etc.), two chapters on vocalizations, "courtship," "nests" (structure, site and construction), "eggs and incubation," "young and their care," "enemies, defense, nesting success and longevity," and "flycatchers as neighbors." A drawing of a Ruddy-tailed Flycatcher perched upright on a branch in the "watchful waiting" posture characteristic of many flycatcher species accompanies each chapter heading, and numerous drawings of other flycatchers and/or their nests (and one of an American Redstart) are scattered throughout the text. Some more technical details (incubation behavior patterns, nest type, clutch size, incubation period, nestling period, rates of feeding nestlings by each sex at different nestling ages, and nesting success to egg and young stages) are relegated to tables, where the data are summarized by species. The plates are grouped together in the midst of the fourth chapter. A "bibliography" (arranged by chapter) and an index complete the book.

Although many of the life history details mentioned must have been based at least partly on banding, marking of individual birds is not emphasized. Banding is mentioned (p. 31) as showing that a pair of Willow Flycatchers studied by Walkinshaw in Michigan nested together in four of five years that they were known to have survived. Known longevity records of several species banded in Trinidad and the U.S.A. are listed on p. 130, where Skutch emphasizes that many of these are minima, implying that banders have more work to do. Also of particular interest to banders will be the list of weights in Table 1 (p. 94), at least some of which differ slightly from those listed by J. B. Dunning, Jr. in his **CRC Handbook of Avian Body Masses** (1993).

Skutch expertly packs numerous life history details of many species into easily flowing sentences that are a pleasure to read. Descriptions, such as that of a vocalization by a female Gray-capped Flycatcher "that sounded like a subdued version of the male's dawn song—an eager, hurried, possibly vexed expostulation to nestlings slow to take their food," (p. 102) convey both Skutch's observations and his interpretation of them. I found no outright errors of fact, although inclusion of Cuba in the

winter range of the Great Crested Flycatcher in the caption to plate 12 implies more usual wintering there than indicated in the seventh edition of the American Ornithologists' Union check-list (1998) or in Caribbean literature. Gardner's drawings enhance the text. The gray portions of Western Kingbird (plate 13) are shown completely white, and most Yellow-bellied Flycatchers that I have seen had yellower bellies than that shown in plate 8 (but that can vary with season). The proof-readers seem to have caught most "typos" and grammatical errors, although a few split infinitives escaped correction and *Saxicola rubetra* (p. 22) is not in italics. The spelling of French (p. 147) instead of the correct, but highly unusual french (always in lower case and with two "f's") presumably resulted from a "correction" by a proof-reader less familiar with the ornithological literature than Skutch. Because Skutch considers most New World flycatchers to be "among the mildest, least offensive" birds, he has substituted the name "flycatcher" for "tyrant" or "tyrannulet" in many South American species (p. xii). This might cause some readers attempting to look up specific details on these species by checking the index to believe that they are not covered in the book.

For banders and birders wishing a good introduction to a diverse array of interesting birds, or wanting to know more about them as a group, this book provides an accurate, entertaining read with plenty of interesting details. For more detailed species accounts, readers will have to turn to some of the sources listed in the "bibliography" or for North American species to the *Birds of North America* series currently in progress. Skutch provides plenty of incentive to study both "the most eccentric tropical species" (p. xiii) still largely unknown and the better known species in more detail.

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