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## Books

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breeding dispersal ranges but intermingled somewhat in northwestern Africa during winter.) MKM

**A report on eight years of banding rehabilitated birds.** S. Smith. 1996. *Corella* 20:20-25. WA Native Bird Hospital Inc., Box 232, Mundaring, Western Australia 6073, Australia (Between 1985 and 1993, 3578 rehabilitated birds of 123 species were banded and released. By June 1993, 125 of these birds of 25 species had been recovered 132 times [3.5% recovery rate]. Time between release and recovery was over three months in over 50% of recoveries, the longest time being attained by a Singing Honeyeater killed by a car 6 years, 9 months after release. Most recoveries were within 50 km of the release site, but a Nankeen Night-Heron was found injured 1323 km away 25 days after release.) MKM

**Satellite tracking of a Wandering Albatross from the Antipodes Islands, New Zealand, to South America.** D. G. Nichols, M. D. Murray, G. P. Elliott and K. J. Walker. 1996. *Corella* 20:28. Peninsula Inst. of TAFE, Breeze St., Carrum, Vic. 3197, Australia (A male fitted with a radio-satellite transmitter flew about 8000 km in 17 days from New Zealand to west of Chile after successfully raising a chick. During a 2.8 day period, the bird flew about 2900 km) MKM

**Note:** Thanks to Michael D. Samuel for a reprint of his paper with E. Frank Bowers abstracted in this issue and to William H. Thompson III for sending a copy of *Bird Watcher's Digest* 23(3).

**MKM** = Martin K. McNicholl

**RCT** = Robert C. Tweit

## Books

**BIRDING IN THE AMERICAN WEST.** Kevin J. Zimmer. 2000. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. 402 pp. Cloth \$49.94 U.S.; paper \$25.00 U.S.

Many western birdwatchers welcomed the publication in 1985 of the book, **THE WESTERN BIRDWATCHER**, written by Kevin J. Zimmer and were disappointed that it went out of print rather quickly, becoming difficult to find. **BIRDING IN THE AMERICAN WEST**, an expanded and updated revision, finds a ready audience.

Historically, there has not been as much information available to the birdwatcher about birds in the western part of America, especially the Rocky Mountains, Great Basin, and the desert southwest, as there has been about the East Coast, "Southeast," and "Midwest." Besides the early explorers, surveyors and soldiers, there were few observers documenting the natural world around them in the vast western wilderness before the twentieth century. Roger Tory Peterson's western bird identification guide (first published in 1941), the bird finding guide by Olin Sewall Petingill (first edition, 1951) and **THE WESTERN BIRDWATCHER** helped to fill a huge knowledge gap for the west.

Although it has a new title and more pages, **BIRDING IN THE AMERICAN WEST** is similar to its predecessor in format and content. The chapters have been reordered and material added, especially under identification and bird finding. The

habitat descriptions in the old book have been eliminated and new art and photography are most welcome. Also welcome is the expanded table of contents, which makes this book much easier to use.

The text of the book is divided into five chapters: Techniques of Finding Birds (26 pp.), Techniques of Identifying Birds (31 pp.), Keeping Field Notes (nine pp.), Difficult Identifications: Beyond the Field Guides (201 pp.) and Finding the Western Birds (108 pp.), followed by a list of species mentioned in A.O.U. checklist order, a list of references (not all cited in the text), and an index.

The "Ready Reference to Key Characteristics" section from the chapter on techniques of bird identification is very helpful, but perhaps would have been even more so had it been interspersed in the appropriate places in the difficult identifications chapter. In fact, the whole chapter on techniques should be read as an introduction to the chapter on difficult identifications, and might well have been placed immediately before it. Readers may want to review sections within the techniques chapter at intervals to refresh their knowledge.

Of most interest to birders is the greatly expanded and updated identification chapter with much better photographs (gone are the photos of drab and boring skins) and some very nice line drawings illustrating the detail in the written descriptions.

Kudos for the drawings to Shawneen Finnegan, Mimi Hoppe Wolf and Dale Zimmerman. New sections include Clark's versus Western grebes, Tundra versus Trumpeter swans, nighthawks, hummingbirds, sapsuckers, brown-backed swallows, and Hoary versus Common redpolls. Substantially expanded are the sections on raptors (not including owls), shorebirds, gulls and terns, alcids, *Empidonax* flycatchers, and vireos. Sections from the first book that disappeared include pewees, *Catharus* thrushes, waterthrushes, grosbeaks, female buntings, and orioles. Dropping the section on orioles is especially disappointing, since females and immatures can be misidentified easily. The section on Baird's versus Savannah sparrows should have included Grasshopper Sparrow, the species most easily confused with Baird's on their wintering grounds.

A minor caveat: the author comments that identification of North American birds is reasonably simple because, among other factors, of the development of a relatively stable taxonomic classification system. This seems a slight simplification since the most recent edition of the A.O.U. checklist continues the process of re-splitting species created by lumping during the twentieth century. The author does not deal with identification of Red Crossbills, which seems anything but simple if the current postulate that the Red Crossbill may be a complex of as many as seven species is accepted.

The chapter on techniques of finding birds contains much helpful information, but the author does not mention the value of knowing songs and calls of as many bird species as possible. This knowledge enables a birder to screen out common or already encountered birds and focus on unknown songs or calls which might be made by a target species or even an unexpected one. Particularly in closed habitats, birds are more often heard than seen, and the ability to focus on target or unknown species will enable a birdwatcher to have a higher success rate in finding (seeing) new birds.

Discussion of the use of tape recorders to lure birds, a subject with which the author has extensive experience, seems not to be written for birders with less experience than he has. Some popular birding areas ban the use of tape recorders and responsible birdwatchers should be aware of rules for the area where they are birding. Photography, another activity which can be stressful to nesting birds, is not discussed.

The bird finding chapter is the weakest part of the book. In several western states, the author relies on his notes and experience rather than consulting the latest available references or local experts. For example, in Arizona he recommends seeking numerous species off Thornydale Road in northwest Tucson; this area is now a sea of homes with little open space, where very specific directions are needed to the little desert space preserved. He also pushes Guadalupe Canyon at the southeastern tip of the state, which is private property with restricted entry at the end of a long dirt road, slippery when wet. There is nothing in Guadalupe Canyon which cannot be found more easily in other areas well described in the current editions (1999) of both the Tucson Audubon and A.B.A. guides. He recommends looking behind the San Xavier Mission for Lucy's Warbler, an area that has been closed to birders for nearly two years.

For states with which he is less familiar, the author sometimes gives detailed directions for a bird from a published source, but sometimes is so vague as to be of little use. For instance, Gray Vireo can be found in Zion National Park; but habitat in the park is quite varied. There is a relatively small area in Zion where the bird is present, and specific directions are needed.

In general, the author has written in a clear and interesting style, but for some reason he prefaced almost every entry in the bird finding chapter with a repetitious and monotonous "This is a..." Where was the editor???

In sum, Kevin Zimmer's second rendition of his book on birds and birding in the western United States has much to recommend it. As a student of western bird species and an international tour leader, his knowledge of birds and birding is deep and solid. Any person who enjoys looking for birds will benefit from reading his tips and suggestions on technique. And banders may find his identification hints especially valuable.

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