

2004

Books

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Recommended Citation

Wright, Kenneth G. (2004) "Books," *North American Bird Bander*. Vol. 29 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nabb/vol29/iss1/9>

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Books

BIRDS OF SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA AND ANTARCTICA. By Martin R. de la Peña and Maurice Rumboll. 1998. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 304 pp. \$24.95.

This book, a reissue of an *Illustrated Checklist* published by Collins in 1998, is astonishingly compact. The area covered spans nearly 55° of latitude and encompasses all or portions of six countries (Uruguay, Argentina, southern Bolivia, Paraguay, southern Brazil, and Chile), as well as adjacent portions of Antarctica. In all 1,128 species of 76 families are treated.

The guide commences with a rather terse five-page introductory chapter outlining a few of the basics: area and species covered, nomenclature, identification, and bird anatomy. The main species accounts follow, in principle, consisting of descriptions on the left page and illustrations on the right. Accounts are compact, but cover all the salient identification features and, for some species, pertinent habitat descriptions. Each account includes a standardized English name and the scientific name. Local names are given where these exist, with the appropriate country (or countries) in parentheses. Notes on vocalization and behavior are given for some species, and illustrations of females and/or juveniles are provided where appropriate. Birds of prey are given a group of five additional plates depicting them in flight. Black-and-white distribution maps are included for all species; these are appended at the back of the book. The maps in most cases include only South America; but for some species, especially the Procellariiformes, they extend southward to the Antarctic Peninsula.

One of the strengths of this guide is in its illustrations, which are arranged over 97 full-color plates. The drawings are accurate and the colors sharp. Unfortunately, illustrations are lacking for 16 species. The distribution maps, though generalized, include political boundaries: a particularly useful feature for "gringos." The distributions of many species are presented in two shades of gray, although the authors give us no explanation as to why (hint: the notes on the back cover suggest that

this could have something to do with frequency). Apart from these minor criticisms, de la Peña and Rumboll are to be commended for doing a wonderful job and for making this much-needed guide available to birdwatchers and other naturalists interested in South American birds.

Needless to say, this book's usefulness to North American bird banders is primarily in plumage descriptions of bird species that occur in both North and South America.

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AGEING NORTH AMERICAN LANDBIRDS BY MOLT LIMITS AND PLUMAGE CRITERIA. A PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPANION TO THE IDENTIFICATION GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS, PART I. By Dan Froehlich. 2003. Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, CA. 51 pp. \$15.00.

Until recently, age determination of passerines in North America depended heavily on skulling, a technique of little to no value during much of the year. European banders long have made use of such plumage characteristics as molt limits and feather shape and wear for ageing birds; these criteria are useful potentially year-round, allowing discrimination of second-year and after-second-year birds, essential for evaluating first-winter survival and subsequent recruitment. It was not until 1987, with the publication of the *Identification Guide to North American Passerines* by Peter Pyle et al., that these techniques became widely available to North American banders for a few dozen species on a somewhat experimental basis. Ten years later, with Pyle's *Identification Guide to North American Birds, Part I* (hereunder called "Pyle"), these techniques were refined, applied to the vast majority of North American passerines and near passerines, and approved by the banding authorities. North American land bird banders now have the information they need to determine age of nearly all birds by plumage. What they lack, for the most part, are the background and skills to apply this information accurately and consistently. Pyle refers frequently to molt limits and uses