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## Books

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# Books

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**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

comparative descriptions, such as tapered and truncate, abraded and fresh, and narrow and broad. These criteria and distinctions are often quite subtle and vary taxonomically and temporally. What do they actually look like, in principle, and for any given species? A bander unfamiliar with the techniques hardly could be blamed for being overwhelmed and hopelessly confused by Pyle's dense, abbreviated text and, in my opinion, often less-than-helpful line drawings. In fact, I have taught numerous workshops that focused to a large extent on understanding Pyle.

Meanwhile, the Europeans, always a step or two ahead, produced *Moult and Ageing of European Passerines* by Lukas Jenni and Raffael Winkler in 1994 (now out of print and virtually impossible to obtain). This monumental work presents color photographs of spread wings of every distinct age- and sex-related plumage, and even some individual variation, for every European passerine species, with detailed captions and accompanying text (if anything, even denser and more abbreviated than Pyle's). These photographs are invaluable for understanding the appearance of essentially any age/sex combination of any species in Europe. They can also be very helpful to banders on this side of "the pond" to illustrate the general concepts involved; but, as I have said, the book is quite technical and essentially unavailable.

We still do not have a North American equivalent of Jenni and Winkler's book, though several groups, including the North American Banding Council, Point Reyes Bird Observatory Conservation Science, and Powdermill Nature Reserve, are working on various renditions, all years away from completion. In the meantime, Dan Froehlich has helped bridge the gap. This concise little manual, affectionately called the "Danual" by some of us, is a visual training guide that introduces in a general format the concepts presented on a species-specific basis by Pyle. Froehlich, who was my successor as Director of The Institute for Bird Populations' Bander Training Program and is now studying many facets of molt for a doctorate, is certainly well qualified to have produced this guide.

Froehlich begins with a simple explanation of the basis on which age classes are distinguished by

plumage; that is, the extents of the molts up to and including the second prebasic molt and the concept of molt limits. He discusses in detail the characteristics of the feathers produced by each of these molts, with excellent sections on where and how to look for molt limits. He then proceeds to discuss what he calls "confounding effects" feather wear, prealternate molts, pseudolimits and timing of molt. All these concepts are illustrated by examples with photographs depicting a variety of species, both specimens and live birds, enhanced with superimposed annotations, pointers and lengthy, instructive captions. The book finishes with a short summary that serves as a "cookbook" approach to finding and interpreting five different types of molt limits. Throughout, Froehlich's text is readable, appropriately advises caution and mentions potential pitfalls and opportunities for misinterpretation.

The photographs, which were not taken in the standardized format of Jenni and Winkler, are of variable quality, sometimes underexposed and/or slightly blurry, but always adequate for showing the intended criteria. The color reproduction, invariably the bane of any publication in which it really matters, is sometimes disappointing. In particular, some of the blacks appear too blue and the fingers visible through several wings lend a reddish cast to the overlying feathers. For example, the Indigo Bunting in Figure 31 looks more like an Indigo Bunting x Northern Cardinal hybrid! I found several "typos," none of which results in any real confusion. The subtitle is potentially misleading since molt limits *are* plumage criteria. One concept that I feel could have been developed more extensively is that of the relative values of within- and between-tract molt limits. As I emphasize to my students, with the latter you are comparing apples with oranges, and differences between feathers in different tracts are always harder to interpret than differences between feathers in the same tract. In my opinion, that makes within-tract limits much more useful, especially to the beginner, and invariably preferable as a first approach when available. I also feel that more emphasis on rectrix shape at the family or genus level would have been very helpful. But all of this is nit-picking; my main complaint with "the Danual" is that I did not write it myself!

Froehlich uses the Humphrey-Parkes (H-P) molt terminology, as does Pyle. The two books are thus fully compatible. Steven N. G. Howell et al. recently proposed a revision to this terminology wherein the prejuvenal molt is equivalent to the first prebasic molt and the presupplemental and first prebasic molts of H-P are called formative molts. If this revision is adopted, as I expect it will be in Pyle's part II, there is considerable potential for confusion among inexperienced banders attempting to use Pyle and/or Froehlich. I hope that both books will be revised accordingly. Jenni and Winkler, adding to the confusion, used yet another terminology!

Any bander at all uncertain of the principles and practice of determining age of birds by plumage, or intimidated by Pyle, will benefit from Froehlich's book. The book also should be required reading in every bander training program. If I could make reading Froehlich a prerequisite for purchasing Pyle, I would!

Froehlich's book can be purchased by check or money order for \$15.00 plus postage (\$3.50 to U.S. destinations, \$5.00 elsewhere) from Slate Creek Press, Box 219, Bolinas, CA 94970. Readers with Internet access can find further ordering information at <http://www.birdpop.org>.

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**A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA, INCLUDING THE PHILIPPINES & BORNEO.** By Morten Strange. 2000. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 398 pp., 700+ photographs. Soft cover. \$29.95.

This book on southeastern Asian birds was the brain child of Eric Oey, the C.E.O. of Periplus Editions (H.K.) Ltd. The idea was to publish a photographic book, as complete as possible, on the birds of southeastern Asia and Indoneasia in guide book format. It would comprise part of a series of *Periplus Nature Guides* on that region. Professional bird photographer Morten Strange agreed to author the book. The area covered is

said to be "...the birds of mainland southeast Asia, the Philippines and Borneo, including peninsular Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Indochina, South China, Hong Kong and Taiwan." The rest of Indonesia is not included. Although the original concept was for the book to be "as complete as possible," practicality dictated that it mainly features "easy-to-see" species. It is intended for "birders" and has no other relevance to bird banding.

The book is handy field-guide size (13 cm. x 19 cm.). There are two pages of Acknowledgements, 12 pages of thorough Introduction, dealing with The Joy of Birdwatching, Birding Techniques, Habitats, The Bird Year, Places to Go and Conservation which includes a list of endemics. Taiwan now has 15 endemics, up from 14 since this book was published. This introductory section is one of the best that I have come across. The "How to Use This Book" section includes Area Covered (see above), Nomenclature, Taxonomy and Sequence (as in *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia* by King, Dickinson and Woodcock, 1975<sup>1</sup>, with small adjustments), Family and Genus, Photographs, Bird Topography, Voice, Habits, Distribution and Status, Abundance Code and Globally Threatened Status. The back of the book includes a useful Glossary, Selected Bibliography and a small Further Information section listing details on Oriental Bird Club, Birdlife International and Nature's Niche Pte., Ltd., a book store in Singapore.

There are 668 species covered as listed in the Index of Scientific Names, with a distribution map for each. In the Index of Common Names, the species count is slightly misleading, as some are double entries (e.g., "Flyeater" = "Golden-bellied Gerygone"). The description on the back cover reads "...more than 700 brilliant color photographs..." I counted 736.

Approximately 60% of the photographs are by Morten Strange; the remaining 40% were by 11 other photographers. Most of the photographs are of high quality. Having dabbled in bird photography myself, I appreciate how difficult it must have been to get some of the shots. However, field guides based on photographs instead of drawings have obvious limitations. As any bird photographer