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Books: Shorebirds of North American, Europe, and Asia: A Guide to Field Identification; Shorebirds of North America: The Photgraphic Guide

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Books

SHOREBIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, EUROPE, AND ASIA: A GUIDE TO FIELD IDENTIFICATION. By Stephen Message and Don Taylor. 2006. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK. 240 pp. \$35.00.

SHOREBIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE. By Dennis Paulson. 2005. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK. 384 pp. \$29.95.

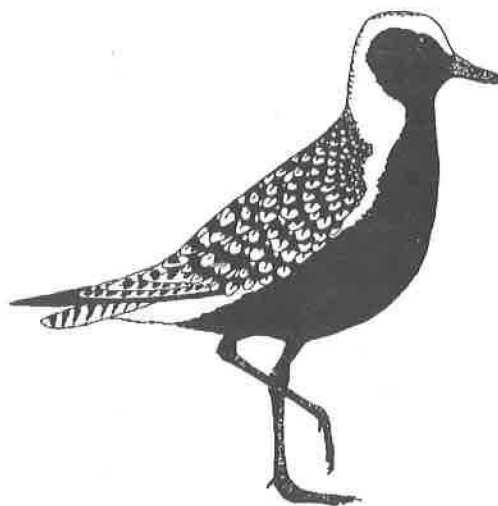
As many shorebirds are notoriously difficult for birdwatchers to identify in the field, the quality of illustrations is central to a good guide on these birds. A question that birders sometimes quibble over is whether photographs or drawn illustrations best show the definitive features. Coming head to head in this debate are these two guides from Princeton University Press. The one by Message and Taylor includes 124 species and useful sections on the topography of shorebirds and flight clues. One page is devoted to field descriptions, behavior and plumages of each species, with plates on opposite pages. The plates are clear, although I thought that the reddish coloration of some species was a bit too bright in my copy. Another 100 pages are devoted to illustrating shorebirds in flight and their ranges over the year. The maps are similar in design to those in the much larger (and older) **Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the world** by Hayman et al. (Houghton Mifflin, 1986). This section is helpful, but I wondered why the authors chose to separate these illustrations from those of birds on the ground. These are minor quibbles and overall, **Shorebirds of North America, Europe and Asia** is an excellent guide for shorebird enthusiasts, with excellent illustrations, clear maps and succinct text. Banders will find it very helpful in the field.

Up next is **Shorebirds of North America**. This book follows Dennis Paulson's outstanding classic **Shorebirds of the Pacific Northwest**, published in 1993. No one in North America can surpass Dennis Paulson in the level of information that he presents on this group of birds. It oozes with his decades of meticulous study in the field and

museum. There is a helpful instructional introduction to this group of birds, with short sections on plumages, molt, behavior and other topics. I particularly liked the fold-out flap on the cover, with an index to all species in the book. About three pages are devoted to each species, where data on size, plumages, identification tips, voice, behavior, habitat and range are presented succinctly. He has scoured the world to get the best photographs—and what a delight he has in store! The superb photos show different plumages through the year and between sexes and age-classes. Value added notes on what to look for in the field, and when and where the photos were taken are especially helpful. Paulson describes the range of each species which I hope he will show in a map in the next version. Paulson's excellent books have become the gold standard of field guides for shorebirds and they show that the quality of photographs now available in North America, Asia, and Europe can easily meet the needs of field guides.

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Black-bellied Plover
by George West