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## The Birdwatcher's Companion to North American Birdlife

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## Books

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**THE BIRDWATCHER'S COMPANION TO NORTH AMERICAN BIRDLIFE.** By Christopher W. Leahy. 2004. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK. xxx + 1039 pp. Hard cover \$39.50; 2006 paperback reprint \$19.95.

This mighty tome is a combination of a dictionary and an encyclopedia, with several brief bird-finding guides, several biographies, check-lists and a major bibliography on birds, birding and ornithology, primarily of North America. While a truly comprehensive treatise on North American birds would require numerous volumes, this is the closest single-volume equivalent that I have seen. The book starts with a series of introductory sections on contents, a list of illustrations, a foreword, an introduction, acknowledgments and "How to use this book." Illustrations of topographic features on a Northern Mockingbird and an Aplomado Falcon's head then precede the main text of 897 entries in alphabetical order. Six appendices and a 76-page bibliography, arranged by topic, close the book. Entries range from a couple-of-words cross reference or one to two sentence definition, to several pages of discussion on a specific topic. Topics include anatomical, behavioral, ecological, evolutionary and physiological terms, brief biographies of ornithologists and people after whom North American bird species have been named, outstanding "bird-finding" areas, types of birds (at various taxonomic levels), birding and ornithological organizations, study equipment and techniques, avian-human interactions (including avian influences on human culture and religion), history, and many others. As implied by the title, emphasis is on North America, but details from other parts of the world are included when appropriate. For example, the account of flightlessness is not confined to the Great Auk, but also includes remarks on penguins, ratites, and Stephen Island Wren.

Two examples of the thoroughness of accounts are those on bird feeding and on food/feeding. The first extends over slightly more than 11 pages and includes an introductory history, followed by subsections on the effects on birdlife, expected birds, regional differences, appropriate times to feed, appropriate foods, provision of water, types/styles of feeders, attraction to feeders by "trash"

birds, predators and other problem species, hazards, appropriate times to cease feeding and "organic bird feeding"—essentially planting bird-attracting plants in a garden. The second, of similar length, discusses the role of food in providing sufficient energy for avian activities, anatomical features and behaviors that permit birds to feed on specific types of food, types of food, variability of diet within and among species, roles of specific senses in finding food, techniques of locating and obtaining food, feeding flocks, feeding interactions, amounts eaten, timing and frequency of feeding, preparation of food, roles of specific anatomical features and physiological processes in procuring and eating specialized diets and storing foods. Both of these topics contain numerous cross-references to related subjects and to more detailed entries on various briefly mentioned topics.

Five of the six appendices consist of lists of North American birds. The first and most comprehensive is essentially that of the most recent (seventh) edition of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), published in 1998, but with an explanatory section on taxonomic categories. The second lists 175 "casual and accidental" species, with brief notes on usual range, and location(s) and number(s) of North American occurrences. The third (four pages) outlines the phylogeny from subfamily level up proposed by C. G. Sibley, B. L. Monroe, Jr. and their associates, some of which has been published and/or announced by the AOU as planned for in the forthcoming eighth edition of their checklist. The fourth is a two-page list of "extinct" birds, listed by genus and levels of Order or higher. This list is actually of fossil forms and does not include such recent extinctions as Labrador Duck, Great Auk, Passenger Pigeon or Dodo. The fifth is a two-page list of "exotic" species that have been observed in the wild in North America but have not established viable breeding populations here. The final appendix is a six-page "calendar," outlining the best times and places in North America to observe various avian spectacles and rarely encountered species.

The entry on banding includes a brief account of its history, an outline of its purposes, a brief discussion of equipment and techniques, some

examples of results, a list of North America's main banding organizations, instructions on reporting bands and a couple of paragraphs on private bands for waterfowl collections and pigeons. Bub's world-wide manual of trapping techniques and Pyle's identification guide are mentioned in the text and Bub is listed in the section on banding in the bibliography, but McClure's (1984) account of capture techniques and banding generally is not mentioned in the text or listed in the references. Mist-netting is discussed in considerable detail, traps only briefly, and cannon/rocket netting and noosing not at all. Although the markers of some color-marking studies are organized at a population level, this is less typical than indicated (p. 42), because multiple color bands on individual birds in many populations are used to study individual birds within many populations. Other types of marking, such as dyeing, neck collars, patagial tags [though not labelled as such] and color bands, are discussed briefly under "Marking" (pp. 478-479).

Banders will find plenty of interest in the sections on age, numerous anatomical features, capture equipment and techniques, measurements, molt and plumages, as well as many of the entries on various aspects of behavior, demography, dispersal, laws, life history, migration and population dynamics in which banding and other marking techniques contribute significantly to their study. Brief biographies of several banders are also included, although sometimes without mention of their contributions to banding. For example, Percy A. Taverner's substantial contributions to Canadian ornithology are outlined briefly, but his earlier initiation in Detroit of the first attempt to organize cooperative banding (Wood 1945, McNicholl 1994, Cranmer-Byng 1996) in North America is not. Banding and/or related techniques are also often included within accounts on other topics, such as the role of "tracking and telemetry" in monitoring the decline of California Condors (p. 259) and a paragraph on mark/capture efforts as contributing to census efforts (p. 136).

As comprehensive a tome as this would be expected to contain at least a few errors and omissions, but most of those that I noted were of the "typo" variety and minor grammatical errors, such as singular/plural mismatches, split infinitives and a few instances of two versions (both singular

and plural or two tenses) of the same word being retained after what appears to have been a tense or other editing change. Minor errors in bird names, such as sometimes omitting the hyphens from several bird names (e.g., Prairie-Chicken on pp. 268 & 962, Golden-Plover on pp. 257 & 258, Scrub-Jays on p. 611, Black-capped Chickadee on p. 815 and Rosy-Finch on p. 12), and the "s" from Ross's Gull on p. 962 seem to be errors that are not repeated in other parts of the book. The reference on p. 462 to Fig. 17 as depicting the grebe water ballet should have referred to Fig. 7, and the page numbers for Galliformes and Gaviiformes on p. 598 are reversed.

I noted only a few errors and omissions in biological facts or terms. The breeding and wintering ranges captioned as those of Kirtland's Warbler on Fig. 18 are those of Blackpoll Warbler as depicted on the overwater portion of their fall route on the map. That figure also lacks migration routes of either of the godwit species indicated on p. 363 as being there. The historical breeding range of the Passenger Pigeon extended well northwest of Manitoba, as indicated (p. 295) into Saskatchewan and Alberta (Houston 1972a, 1972b). Although the statement (p. 368) that grebes seldom fly when not migrating is true generally, Horned Grebes wintering along coastal British Columbia do so quite frequently (pers. obs.). Although most gull species do nest in colonies (p. 374), a few species (e.g. Herring Gull) commonly or occasionally also nest as single pairs, and although Bonaparte's Gulls usually nest in trees, there are several Alberta and Saskatchewan records of marsh-nesting Bonaparte's (e.g., Symons 1968; Renaud and Wapple 2001).

In addition to owls, the term "hooting" also applies to "Blue" (Sooty and Dusky) grouse song (e.g., Zwickel and Bendell 2004). Hybrid Mallard x Northern Pintail are *Anas platyrhynchos* x *A. acuta*, not x *rubripes* (p. 402). The description of kinglet song (p. 446) applies well to Ruby-crowned, but not to Golden-crowned. Coastal British Columbia can be added to Oregon as vagrant localities of Great Knot records (p. 448).

Although Canadian content is higher and more accurate than in many "North American" books, the section on laws (pp. 451-456) applies more to U.S. than Canadian laws. For example, only federal

permits are required for banding most birds in Canada, although some provinces require permits to band "game" birds.

The nest located high in a California tree in 1974 was a Marbled, not an Ancient (p. 519) Murrelet (Binford et al. 1975). The section on Peregrine Falcon in the Endangered Species account (pp. 256-257) gives well-deserved credit to Tom Cade and several U.S. agencies for the recovery, but omits the parallel efforts of Richard Fyfe and several Canadian agencies (see references in White et al. 2002), in contrast to the Whooping Crane account in which the cooperative and joint nature of Canadian and U.S. efforts is documented.

Although the harvest of eider down in Nordic countries is well known (p. 225), readers would probably be interested to know that such a harvest also occurs in Quebec (Munro 1996). Although the second meaning of "duck" as the female (as opposed to the drake) of duck species is mentioned under "drake," it is omitted from "duck," a rare lack of cross-referencing.

Only three of the six societies listed as joining the original three that formed the Ornithological Societies of North America actually belong to OSNA, although the other three have participated in joint meetings with the OSNA societies. The two historical books listed as being edited by Davis and Jenkins (pp. 602 and 1011) should refer to Davis and Jackson. Double-crested should be added to the cormorant species that sometimes nest in trees (p. 559) (e.g. Johnsgard 1993; pers. obs.). Strigiformes (owls) consists of two families, Strigidae and Tytonidae, not just one (p. 604). Birds are hatched, not born (pp. 6, 7, 15, 604, 811, 885). Scrub-Jay is hyphenated currently (p. 611). The description of the song of Sprague's Pipit (p. 640) as a "strange dry rattle or hiss" may refer to a song that I have yet to hear, but certainly does not describe the beautiful ringing flight song that I associate with them over Canada's prairie provinces.

A few references cited are not listed in the bibliography, at least under the topic of the entries in which they are cited (e.g., Oddie 1995 on p. 93, Nottebohm and Kroodsmas 1991 on p. 733). An update on the section on tripods in the photography

account could have been the recent use of wheelbarrows and bicycle trailers to transport the huge lenses of some photographers. Several references in the text vary slightly from that in the appropriate section of the bibliography by missing co-authors or slight differences between the years. Hyphens are missing from *Bird-Lore* (pp. 138, 1011) and *Jack-Pine Warbler* (p.1009). *NABB* and *Waterbirds* (formerly *Colonial Waterbirds*) are missing from the list of primarily North American bird journals, although the Waterbird Society's bulletin, a newsletter, is listed (p. 1014). Except for Alberta, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, no books are listed for Canadian provinces in the state/provincial bird book list (pp. 1026-1029), and those listed for both Alberta and Nova Scotia are earlier editions of books that have since been revised. Ontario is also omitted from the list of state and provincial breeding bird atlases, even though its first edition (Cadman et al. 1987) was published before both the Alberta and Quebec atlases, both of which are listed. The list of accidental and casual species (Appendix II) was probably out of date by the time it was published.

A well-documented omission that caught my eye was a Spoonbill Sandpiper in British Columbia in 1978 (Sauppe et al. 1978). Although bird-a-thons do raise funds for conservation as noted (p.88), their rationale was also to raise funds for the research on which conservation efforts should be based. Although the text indicates that two cuckoo species are considered "accidental stragglers" in North America" (p. 182), only one is listed in the appendix indicated. I suspect that this reflects an increase in Alaska records of Common Cuckoos between drafts, warranting its transfer to the main checklist (Appendix I).

Peter Stettenheim should have been included among the editors of *Birds of North America* (p. 94), as he conceived of the project and was the initial editor. The series was not published in 1990, as indicated on p. 272, but from 1992 to 2002. Although the North American Bluebird Society published a quarterly journal, *Sialia* (p. 101) until 1999, it was then replaced by a magazine, *Bluebird*.

I also noticed a few geographical errors: Chernobyl is in Ukraine, not Russia (p. 16), Delta Marsh, Manitoba (where I conducted most of my M. Sc.

Research) is along the southern shore of Lake Manitoba, northwest of Winnipeg, not northeast of Winnipeg and not connected to either the Assiniboine River or Lake Winnipeg (p. 185). The Assiniboine River empties into the Red, which empties into Lake Winnipeg through the Netley marshes. British Columbia is miss-spelled "Colombia" on p. 269.

Banders, and all others who study birds, would benefit from having this volume on their shelves as a starting point for looking up the literature on almost any group of North American birds and almost any aspect of avian biology. Definitions are clear and concise, while longer accounts are thorough and written authoritatively and comprehensively, often with a touch of humour (e.g., the account on photography). Thorough cross-referencing, the extensive bibliography and a few references directly in the text make it a great starting place for the literature search aspect of writing up research results and incidental observations of avian behavior, ecology or life history. Even an alphabetical list of the English names of North American bird families (pp. xxi-xxii) is made more user-friendly by listing not only the main English name, but also other species names with the family name in brackets. For example, not only is CUCKOO listed, but also ANI (CUCKOO) and ROADRUNNER (CUCKOO).

Those who can afford few items in their libraries should include this one if at all possible!

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