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## Biometrics of Birds Throughout the Greater Caribbean Basin

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# Books

## WHEELER RAPTORS GUIDES REPRINTED IN PAPERBACK

Raptor banders and watchers who hesitate to risk taking hard cover books into the field and/or whose budgets never stretch to all the books that they desire will be pleased to learn that the two recent field guides to North American diurnal raptors by Brian W. Wheeler are now available in paperback editions for \$29.95 each from Princeton University Press, 41 William St., Princeton, NJ 08540-5237.

Both were reviewed favorably in NABB:

**RAPTORS OF EASTERN NORTH AMERICA.** By Brian K. Wheeler. 2003. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. xvi + 456 pp. \$45.00; paperback edition, 2007 \$29.95. —reviewed by Martin Wernaart in *NABB* 32:83, 2007.

**RAPTORS OF WESTERN NORTH AMERICA.** By Brian K. Wheeler. 2003. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. xv + 544 pp. \$49.50; paperback edition, 2007 \$29.95. —reviewed by Martin K. McNicholl in *NABB* 31:128-132, 2006.

**Martin K. McNicholl**  
Literature Editor

**BIOMETRICS OF BIRDS THROUGHOUT THE GREATER CARIBBEAN BASIN.** By Wayne J. Arendt, John Faaborg, George E. Wallace and Orlando H. Garrido. 2004. *Proceedings of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology* 8(1), Camarillo, CA. viii + 33 pp. + computer CD. \$25.00

This slim volume and its accompanying CD provide a wealth of data on morphometrics collected on about 30,000 birds of 276 species that occur in the Greater Antilles. Although some of these data were recorded on recently collected birds, many were collected on live birds during banding operations. Banders often collect such data routinely, but they usually remain in unpublished files. Apart from overall length in field guides, most previously published data on morphometrics of Caribbean endemics and near-endemics are on weights or mass (especially by Storrs L. Olson and associates). This compilation makes such data on these endemics much more available than previously, facilitating comparisons within and

among islands. In addition, data are included on many North American-breeding birds while on migration or on their wintering grounds, enabling researchers to compare such features with similar data collected during the breeding season.

The text, dedicated to the late Robert Sutton of Jamaica, begins with an overview of the scope and history of the project, which grew out of the long-term Puerto Rican avian ecology studies of Arendt and Faaborg and gradually expanded to include other islands and studies of several other colleagues. A list of seven types of studies in which such data are important follows, with numerous references to examples of studies using such data listed in each. A brief introduction discusses the importance of such measurements and the problems of using museum specimens in comparison with data collected on living birds (primarily by banders). A table lists the study areas from 30 islands from which the data were collected, with vegetational association of each indicated. Methods of data collection and a guide to interpreting data are then indicated, including brief definitions of the nine types of measurements covered: body mass, wing chord, exposed culmen length, nares culmen length, culmen width, penultimate primary, tarsus, and central rectrix. A brief discussion, list of contributors, acknowledgements and list of literature cited complete the text.

My computer would not "open" the contents of the CD, but I was able to read it on another computer. It is divided into five sections: a two-paragraph guide to interpreting the data; a 188-page table of data in spread-sheet format; a "browse by species" section, allowing the reader to zero in on a given species - listed alphabetically by genus; a brief account of the history and activities of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology; and a brief "Help" section on using Adobe readers. Species in the data table are listed by Order for sub-Passerines and by Family for Passerines. Data listed for each species include island, species code and AOU number, sample size, gender, age, wing chord, body mass, culmen exposed from nares, culmen depth, culmen width, penultimate primary, tarsus and central rectrix, with mean, standard deviation,

minimum and maximum for each type of measurement. The "browse by species" section includes data by specimen, including island, banding site, habitat, band number, age, gender and whichever morphometric data were collected on each specimen.

This compilation should prove useful to all ornithologists whose research involves biometrics of Caribbean-resident birds and Nearctic-breeding birds that migrate through and/or winter in the Caribbean. I was delighted to see the data from a joint Canadian-Cuban four-year project included, but disappointed that those from an earlier two-year training project were missing [judging from the list of banders and collectors listed in the acknowledgements and from the list of locations]. As noted by the authors, data from numerous other brief projects are undoubtedly also missing. I hope that this publication will stimulate participants in other projects to contribute their data to the data base for possible future editions. I also felt that far too many of the references cited were missing from the literature cited list for such a short publication (Banks 1970, Blueweiss et al. 1978, Collins and Atwood 1981, Johnson and Marten 1992, Jung and Mees 1958, Lundberg et al. 1981, Olson 1984, Ricklefs 1969, Ridway 1907, and possibly Hayes et al. in press, although I suspect that the latter refers to Hayes et al. 2004) and some (e.g. Seutin et al. 1993 and 1994) are listed considerably out of order. "Traill's" Flycatcher is also cited incorrectly as Trail's in the title of a paper by Winker in which the spelling is correct in the original. These omissions and correction suggest rushed or superficial proof-reading, but detract only slightly from the overall quality and usefulness of this publication. It can be ordered from WFVZ by check/cheque or money order at 439 Calle San Pablo, Camarillo, CA 93012.

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**THE CAROLINA PARAKEET [:] GLIMPSES OF A VANISHED BIRD.** By Noel F. R. Snyder. 2004. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. and Oxford, U.K. xiv+153 pp. \$29.95.

This book brings the previously published scientific literature on Carolina Parakeets, newspaper,

magazine and other informal published accounts and previously unpublished anecdotes of currently or recently living residents of areas inhabited by Carolina Parakeets together to present a thorough account of known details of its life history and decline to extinction. Since the range and habitat of this species overlapped the range and habitat of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, the book also documents some details of the habitat and decline of that extinct or nearly extinct species.

An unnumbered introduction notes the abundance of this species when Europeans first began to settle North America, the influence of its bright plumage and noisy behavior in stimulating early descriptions of the bird and various aspects of its behavior and natural history, as well as the precipitous nature of its decline to extinction, paralleling the declines of Passenger Pigeons and bison, both of which were also abundant species. Possible reasons for its extinction are also summarized briefly. Eleven numbered chapters follow, the first covering physical characteristics, verified and potential range, vocalizations, nomenclature and taxonomic relationships. The next two chapters document the decline of the parakeet and review in considerable detail the plausibility or otherwise of several previously published and unpublished reports considerably later than the last confirmed sightings. Several records include sufficient detail of plumage and/or behavior to suggest that at least a few individuals and small flocks persisted beyond positively verified dates. Snyder's interviews with several non-naturalists who lived within the range of the parakeets also revealed some aspects of their natural history that had not been documented previously, such as roosting in barns, or that seemed to be more significant than thought previously, such as the extent of sandspurs and cockleburs in their diets. Snyder is careful to consider consistency of details among observers in sorting out the probable degree of accuracy or inaccuracy of reported sightings at specific locations and of specific behaviors. The next three chapters summarize what is known or suspected about several aspects of the natural history of this species (habitat and requirements, food, feeding behavior, movements, breeding habits and characteristics), each in comparison with related species, if known. Although Snyder agrees that most documented nests were in cavities, he

species entry consists of the proposed English name, current recognized scientific name, and an abbreviation indicating broad geographical range. A CD included in a package attached to the inside back cover consists of three species lists (Nonpasserines, Suboscine Passerines and Oscine Passerines) containing the same information on names, but adding more details on ranges.

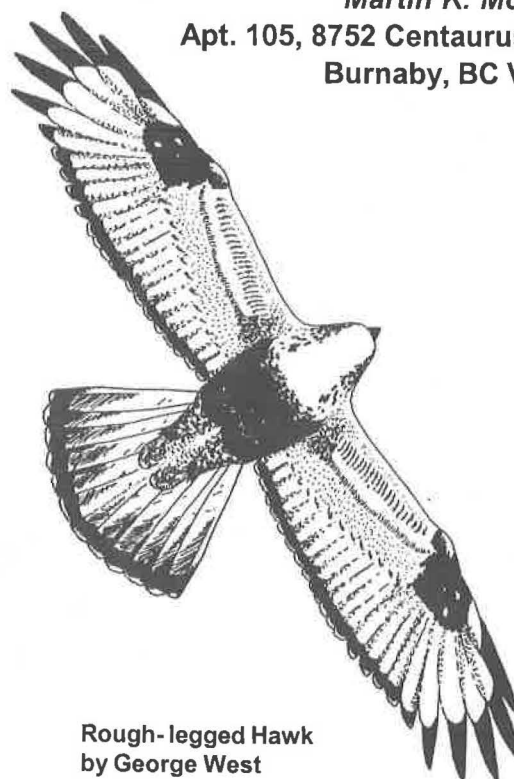
Banders will be interested to see former WBBA Vice-President Stephen M. Russell among the committee members, but the main interest of banders in this book will be in the proposed names themselves. Since American, Australian, and Eurasian nomenclatural and taxonomic committees accept and reject proposed changes at different paces, the list agrees with several recent North American decisions, but differs from others. For example, like the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) this committee lists Canada and Cackling geese as two species, still lists Brant as one species, lists Common and Wilson's snipe as two species, and still lists Hoary (Arctic) Redpoll as one species, whereas unlike the AOU, they still list Blue Grouse as one species, list five species of scoter and retain Caspian Tern in the genus *Sterna*. Where different names are used currently for the same species on different continents, the committee recommends using the American version for some (e.g., Horned instead of Slavonian Grebe, murre instead of including them among guillemots, Barn instead of European or "the" Swallow, Horned instead of Shore Lark), the Eurasian version for others (e.g., Black-necked instead of Eared Grebe, Grey instead of Black-bellied Plover, Little Auk instead of Dovekie, Sand Martin instead of Bank Swallow, Common instead of European Starling and Two-barred instead of White-winged Crossbill), and completely new names for others (e.g., Great Northern Loon instead of Great Northern Diver or Common Loon, American White Ibis, Pomarine Skua instead of Pomarine Jaeger or Pomatorhine Skua, Roughleg instead of Rough-legged Buzzard or Rough-legged Hawk, Angel Tern for *Gygis* instead of Fairy Tern, White Tern or White Noddy and Buff-bellied instead of American Pipit).

As this book amounts to a progress report, rather than a definitive document, it will be of interest primarily to readers who follow nomenclatural and taxonomic changes. Inclusion of the current American, Australasian, and Eurasian names of those species with more than one current name would have added to its usefulness. I did not notice any spelling or other "typographical" errors, but one reference by Rasmussen and Anderson (p. 2) is missing from the list of literature cited and at least one geographic code (AU for Australasian) is incorrect for at least one species (the Abyssinian Roller of Africa) (Serle et al. 1977). As the AOU's committee has already rejected the proposals on hyphens outlined in this document (Anonymous 2007), I doubt that progress on this project will accelerate in the near future.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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- Serle, W., G.J. Morel and W. Hartwig. 1977. A field guide to the birds of west Africa. Collins, London.

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Rough-legged Hawk  
by George West