

Ornithological Literature

Robert B. Payne, Review Editor

THE CURSE OF THE LABRADOR DUCK. MY OBSESSIVE QUEST TO THE EDGE OF EXTINCTION. By Glen Chilton. Simon & Schuster, New York, USA. 2009: x + 305 pages, 10 black and white figures, 1 map. ISBN: 978-1-4391-0247-3; 978-1-4391-2499-4 (ebook). \$25.00 (hardcover).—For those whose interest in birds extends beyond another tick on their life list, extinct birds often provide a source of intense fascination. Each species has its own allure, but one that is also coupled with an air of unattainability, like a photograph of a beautiful woman on the obituary page. The Labrador Duck (*Camptorhynchus labradorius*), the first endemic North American bird to disappear historically, about 1875, remains one of the most perversely enigmatic of extinct birds. Although known from a fair number of specimens (at least 55 still exist), few have reliable data and virtually nothing is known about the breeding of the species or its summer distribution. It has escaped the attention of monographers such as have labored over the Great Auk (*Pinguinus impennis*), Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), and Carolina Parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*).

Enter Glen Chilton, who debuted in ornithology on the bandwagon of studies of song dialects of the White-crowned Sparrow, which led to his being an author on the account of *Zonotrichia leucophrys* in the *Birds of North America* series. Lured by the prospect of a gratis set of that costly work, he chose to write another species account and what could possibly have been easier than the Labrador Duck, about which so little was known? With the account of the Labrador Duck under his belt, Chilton became its de facto “authority,” thus setting the stage for his “obsessive” quest to examine every specimen of the species, perhaps not unlike the person who patronized every Starbucks coffee shop in the world to set a record.

This book is about Chilton’s visits to museums scattered through Europe and North America to view specimens of Labrador Ducks. The opposite of a work of scholarship, it is very much a travelogue, and a tedious one at that. From the author’s web site we learn that Chilton wants people to believe that he is a bon vivant engaged

in “outrageous adventures,” which in this case means going to a distant city, measuring a “stuffed duck,” and then wandering about town in search of alcohol and vegetarian food (to me, the thought of eating tofu in Paris and Vienna is more depressing than the fate of the Labrador Duck). The title, of course, is a gimmick, the only curse being the book itself. Nor does the subtitle make much sense considering that the Labrador Duck is long past the edge of extinction.

Chilton’s background and attitude did little to prepare him for museum work, as he plainly knows next to nothing about collecting or preparing birds. The specimens he looked at met their ends by being “blasted,” “blown to kingdom come,” or shot full of “bullets,” which, if true, would have left little for him to examine. Although he includes brief instructions on preparation techniques taken from a museum pamphlet, he seems not to understand the process and refers more than once to the incision through which the “guts were pulled out.” Specimens are invariably “stuffed,” a word generally avoided by museum ornithologists but apparently deliberately overused by Chilton to convey his poorly disguised disdain for museums as places full of “stuffed” dead things. Not being knowledgeable of the history of museum ornithology, Chilton is bound to have overlooked facts that would be evident to someone with more experience. What else could one expect from one for whom the name Verreaux carried no significance? We also read (page 304) that: “In November of 1844, Colonel Nicolas Pike shot a drake Labrador Duck at the mouth of the Ipswich River at the south end of Plum Island, New York. History doesn’t say whether or not the duck was doing anything to provoke the colonel. Perhaps Pike just really, really hated ducks”. Not only is this gratuitously stupid, but Chilton shows no evidence of recognizing the identity of Nicolas Pike nor of Pike’s connection with other extinct birds (*Subtropical Rambles in the Land of the Aphanapteryx*, 1873).

Chilton provides a brief description, usually only a paragraph, mostly detailing defects, of the various specimens of Labrador Duck. In a few instances he appears to have unearthed some new

information on the history of a given specimen, which is commendable. But most of the book is simply an ego-indulging procession of irrelevancies. Why do we need to know that he was a breech birth, a nervous and obsessive child, and that on at least four occasions in his duck travels he shared a room, or even a bed with various young women who were not his wife? Chilton seems to regard himself as quite a humorist, but his humor is so tiresomely puerile as to make George Gobel and Dave Barry seem like genuine wits. Pick any pejorative adjective that describes annoying prose and it will apply somewhere in this book: arrogant, facetious, facile, flippant, glib, precious, sophomoric, and snotty. Throughout, Chilton manages to be condescending or even downright insulting to individuals, institutions, and entire countries. I daresay that following the appearance of this book he will be unwelcome in many places where he was once treated with courtesy and respect.

Errors large and small throughout the book call into question the accuracy of almost anything Chilton writes. For example, the Portuguese word for "cultivator" is *lavrador*, not *llavrador* (incidentally, Chilton seems to revel in his ignorance of languages). Some older bird specimens were preserved with arsenic, not cyanide. There are no sea lions, large or small, around Grand Manan Island or anywhere else in the North Atlantic. The national mall in Washington does not run just from the Capitol to the Washington Monument, which latter he has apparently confused with the Lincoln Memorial. It seems intended that the book not be consulted again after its first reading, as there is no table of contents, no index, and no bibliography.

As partial recompense for inflicting this fulsome blot on the literature of extinct birds, Chilton owes ornithology and the staffs of all the museums he visited an exceptionally scholarly and insightful monograph on the Labrador Duck. Considering that he was ill equipped to undertake such an endeavor in the first place, I doubt that he will ever be able to make satisfactory repayment of his debt.—STORRS L. OLSON, Curator, Division of Birds, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560, USA; e-mail: olsons@si.edu

BIRD BANDING IN NORTH AMERICA: THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS. Edited by Jerome A. Jackson, William E. Davis Jr., and

John Tautin. Nuttall Ornithological Club, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 2008: ix and 280 pages, 62 figures and photographs. ISBN: 1-877973-45-9. \$40.00 (cloth).—This volume brings together contributions presented at a symposium which occurred at the North American Ornithological Conference in New Orleans in 2002. The symposium commemorated 100 years of scientific bird banding in North America, the birth of which is designated by the banding of Black-crowned Night-herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) by the Smithsonian Institution's Paul Bartsch in 1902. The 12 chapters trace the trajectory of bird marking from modest but enthusiastic beginnings through the wide variety of scientific pursuits that have used this important ornithological tool.

The first three chapters provide historical perspective. Chapter 1 gives the early history of bird banding in North America. It starts with a bit of background on marking birds in the 16th century in the Old World, and quickly settles in North America, relating the well-known story of John James Audubon's 1804 experiment of marking Eastern Phoebes (*Sayornis phoebe*) with silver wire. This is followed by an interesting overview of the factors that led to the popularity of nature study in general and bird marking in particular in the early 20th century – including such disparate elements as increased leisure time due to the availability of electricity and the sudden accessibility of aluminum. The chapter goes on to the more specific underpinnings: the genesis of organized banding, founding of the American Bird Banding Association and the first banding stations, and finally the federal government's role in recognizing and controlling banding in the United States

Chapter 2 discusses the role of banding organizations in education and training of banders; the distribution of data, techniques, and materials; and in encouraging regional cooperation. The organizations mentioned include national (including the present North American Banding Council) and regional groups, as well as major bird observatories and banding station networks. They are arranged by type with a brief summary of each group's history and function.

Chapter 3 focuses on the history of the Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL). The BBL wasn't formally designated as such until 1961, but this chapter begins in 1920, when Frederick Lincoln was charged by the USDA Bureau of Biological Survey with organizing their "banding office."

He remained in this position until 1946 and is noted as the true founder of the modern bird banding program. The chapter proceeds to tell the history of the BBL by decade, ending in 2002, which coincided with the retirement of the BBL's sixth Chief and chapter author John Tautin.

The rest of the book provides overviews of the role of bird banding in various research areas, focusing on particular instances where banding has made important scientific contributions. These include population monitoring and ecology, rare species recovery, migratory game bird and waterbird conservation, avian ecotoxicology and disease, habitat use, and behavioral research. The chapters overall make a fine case for the value of bird banding, even though, as several authors point out, the original intent was focused primarily on bird movements. Most chapters conclude with recent developments and future directions in each area, and how banding might fit into these new horizons.

The chapters in this compendium vary in form from chronologies and narratives to something more resembling typical scientific style. Every chapter ended with literature cited, a convention I prefer over paging to the end of the entire volume to look up a reference. I wasn't able to discern whether there was any particular order to the chapters past the first three, which dealt with history. The volume might have flowed a little better if the chapters had progressed from broad research themes to more specific studies, or perhaps followed some chronological order. I found only one major editing gaff. In Chapter 5, a concluding paragraph was printed twice, once at the end of a series of species accounts, and again three paragraphs later at the end of the chapter.

There are 62 black-and-white figures in the book, mostly photographs. Many of them are "mug shots," generally of historical figures or researchers whose work is featured in the chapter. I often don't notice these things, but in this volume I could not help being struck that over half of the photos featured white guys, mostly middle-aged. There were a few women, and no people of color. Are bird banding and ornithology really that devoid of ethnic, racial, and gender diversity? Yikes. We have something to work toward in the next hundred years.—JULIE A. CRAVES, Rouge River Bird Observatory, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, MI 48128, USA; e-mail: jcraves@umd.umich.edu

INGESTION OF LEAD FROM SPENT AMMUNITION: IMPLICATIONS FOR WILDLIFE AND HUMANS. By Richard T. Watson, Mark Fuller, Mark Pokras, and W. Grainger Hunt. The Peregrine Fund, Boise, Idaho, USA. 2009: 383 pages. ISBN: 0-9619839-5-7. \$ None shown. (paper).—As a rule, conference proceedings are uninspiring tomes. The ugly stepchildren of the academic publication family; their contents are often limited to progress reports of ongoing research, literature reviews, and the results of short-term Master's Degree research projects. There are some conferences, however, for which a published proceedings is not only appropriate, but also provides an exceptionally useful resource for a wide audience. The proceedings of the conference *Ingestion of Lead from Spent Ammunition: Implications for Wildlife and Humans*, held 12–15 May 2008 at Boise State University is one of these. The book fully addresses the ubiquitous nature of lead toxicity by including voices from science, medicine, policy, and business. Whereas it would be difficult to find one scientific journal that would accept this breadth of viewpoints, the proceedings format allows for the cross-disciplinary compilation of knowledge necessary to put the lead issue in context.

Everyone knows something about the toxic effects of lead but few know everything about it. For example, most Americans know that in the 1970s, awareness of the effects of lead on human health resulted in its removal from house paint and gasoline. Hunters know that in 1991, documented adverse effects of lead ingestion on eagles and waterfowl species resulted in regulations outlawing lead shot for waterfowl hunting. *Ingestion of Lead from Spent Ammunition* provides information of which most people are not aware, such as: how lead is toxic (in a fascinating paper by Pokras and Kneeland); effects of low-dose exposure of lead on humans who consume hunted game; and the magnitude of the problem in terms of the amount of lead released into the environment by outdoor sports (6–10 thousand metric tons annually in the U.S.) or the number of species known to have incidences of high lead levels (over 130 species of vertebrates).

The unique strength of this book is its "conservation medicine" approach which Pokras and Kneeland (page 7) define as "examin[ing] the linkages among the health of people, animals, and the environment". Imagine the value to wildlife rehabilitation veterinarians when they tap into the

rich field of lead exposure in human development, and vice versa; or the public health official who becomes familiar with the work on retention of lead fragments in hunted wildlife. Proof of this book's integrated approach to lead is the diversity of author affiliations: wildlife research centers, zoos, environmental agencies and non-profits, human medicine, and state conservation offices, to name a few.

The book is composed of 53 papers (25 peer-reviewed, 10 not peer-reviewed, and 18 extended abstracts) organized in four main sections: review of lead uptake and toxicosis in humans and wildlife; lead exposure in humans from spent ammunition; lead exposure, sources, and toxicosis in wildlife; and, remediation of lead exposure from spent ammunition. There are also nine expert commentaries transcribed from the meeting and an introduction and conference summary by the esteemed raptor biologist Ian Newton. Birds, especially raptors, are the predominant taxonomic group in the research. Not surprisingly, work on the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) is well represented. Other bird species addressed include Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and fish eagles (*Haliaeetus* spp.), waterfowl, doves, and other terrestrial birds.

Geographically, most papers concern the United States, but there is good representation from Europe. In the one paper from South America, Saggese et al. review lead toxicosis in raptors from Argentina. In discussing sources of lead in the environment, they cite the recent and growing popularity of dove and pigeon hunting in central Argentina where, absent any limits on the number of birds killed, hunters regularly discharge over 1,000 cartridges per day, killing or injuring as many birds. The barbarism of these hunts is, therefore, compounded by the 1,600 metric tons of lead released into the local environment each year and the fact that crippled and dead birds are left for scavengers (including humans) to consume, lead shot and all.

There are only two minor flaws with the book. The first is the repetition of basic information in many of the papers. One would only notice this if the book was read cover-to-cover, a method for which the book was not designed. The second flaw concerns the 18 entries that are extended abstracts. Some of these are quite extensive with figures and tables, etc. while others aren't 'extended' at all. Either way, no one likes to cite abstracts and when I searched for full papers that

these abstracts should have evolved into by now I wasn't able to find any.

In his closing comments for the meeting, Ian Newton noted the conference showed that lead from spent ammunition poses a bigger human health problem than previously recognized. Indeed, after reading this book, one cannot help but be alarmed at the widespread and insidious nature of lead ingestion by humans and wildlife. These proceedings are a call for action and, unlike many environmental problems that seem insurmountable; the removal of lead from outdoor sporting equipment is attainable.

The book is published by the non-profit organization The Peregrine Fund and the entire proceedings are available at http://www.peregrinefund.org/Lead_conference/. Other than a few color photos and figures online that are represented in grayscale in the print edition, there are no substantial differences between the book and the online version. The reader's personal preference is the best guide in deciding which version to acquire. Either way, acquire this book and spread the word! I strongly recommend this book to anyone who wants to be more knowledgeable about the threats to wildlife, humans, and the environment posed by the release of lead into our fields and wetlands.—JOHN CURNUTT, Regional Wildlife Ecologist, USDA, Forest Service, Eastern Region, 626 East Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53203, USA; e-mail: jcurnutt@fs.fed.us

THE BIRDS OF THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA. PART 5. GAZETTEER AND BIBLIOGRAPHY. By Deborah C. Siegel and Storrs L. Olson. Buteo Books, Shipman, Virginia, USA. 2008: 516 pages plus 1 inset map. ISBN: 978-0-931130-17-5. \$45.00 (hardcover).—Even in these modern days of hand-held GPS receivers and Google Earth, the final volume of Alexander Wetmore's *magnum opus: The Birds of the Republic of Panama* is a welcome addition to the library of any serious student of neotropical birds who will want to make room for it along side the previous four volumes. It is outstanding in its primary role, as a 20th century ornithological gazetteer, but most modern readers will find it wanting a few 21st century trappings that were left out and we can hope will be included in some future format.

The authors, Deborah Siegel and Storrs Olson, have done meticulous work in providing geo-

graphic precision to ambiguous place names, which are the norm in much of Latin America. Those who have done field work in these parts are familiar with the simultaneous tendency for multiple local names for a single place, the application of a general name to a region too large to be considered a single biogeographic point, and the duplication of common names across distant districts and provinces. For example, this volume lists nine unique locations with the moniker “San José” which the authors dutifully sort out. Siegel and Olson have also been mindful of the tendency of place names to change, which is especially problematic for the areas surrounding the Panama Canal; in many cases, a Spanish-language place name replaced earlier English-language names used during the U.S. administration of the Canal Zone. I recently reviewed collecting localities for the *niglaris* subspecies of *Myrmeciza exsul* mentioned in *The Birds of Panama. Volume 3*. Not surprisingly I was able to find precise locations and geographical coordinates for all, but I should also note that I found the same information on Google; the value of this volume is in the annotations for each location. For example, many of the place name descriptions follow a hyperlink format, whereby other place names of interest relative to the location in question are referenced. It was in this way that I was able to make sense of the confusion surrounding Cerros Colorado, Santiago and Flores: an important endemic bird area in the Serranía de Tabascá in western Panama. It should also be noted the authors were careful with resolving the many unintentional variants of place names caused by collectors (including me) whose command of Spanish was less than perfect.

Equally valuable is the detailed annotated bibliography of Panamanian ornithology. The span of this bibliography is vast. Here, topics as diverse as systematics, paleozoography, and natural history comingle from both recent (up until ~ 2005) and historical sources. I am especially appreciative for the effort the authors undertook to include works not typically found in searchable data bases such as museum monographs and Latin American regional journals published in Spanish. This volume should foster the inclusion of these works into the cited literature of future studies. Particularly of interest is the inclusion of the reference for a multitude of named taxa (genus, species or subspecies) with a Panamanian type location; perhaps only the

authors know how close to being an exhaustive list this may be.

Given this attention to detail, I wonder how much greater an impact this final volume – in what is largely a 20th century work – could have had if only more 21st century informatics were used. As an active collector of birds in Panama, one of my favorite features of the book is a map highlighting every collecting location (as well as the geographic gaps in our collective efforts). However, the map appears to be an afterthought, as it is a separate inset to the book. There is no way to go from a dot on the map to that place name in the text to learn more about who collected there and when. Similarly, there is no way to find all of the place names in any geographic region, such as the Pearl Islands or the Darién Province, despite how useful that would be. I imagine that many of my colleagues from the gene jockey cohort of ornithologists will appreciate the bibliography’s detailed listing of 19th century taxonomic literature when it comes time to give proper names to resurrected lineages. However, without a searchable index for scientific names, I wonder if this resource will be used to its fullest capability. Providing a digital PDF of the text would allow for searching on strings such as province name or latitude and longitude ranges. Alternatively, perhaps the basics of the place names (and the point map) could be created as an internet-based resource; readers could be directed to the text for the details pertaining to specific locations. To be fair, other gazetteers of Latin American ornithology have these problems, but the fact that this volume was published in 2008 makes their omission more apparent.

It is worth noting the book begins with a short bibliography of Dr. Wetmore that includes his portrait and a detailed timeline of his field expeditions in Panama. This is fitting for the final volume of Wetmore’s unparalleled work. Panama has had a much larger role in the development of neotropical ornithology than could be predicted by its geographic size. This is in no small part due to the generations of ornithologists that refer to well-thumbed pages of *The Birds of Panama* to learn detail after detail about the distribution and natural history of that country’s birds. We are all indebted for his effort.—MATTHEW J. MILLER, Postdoctoral Fellow in Molecular Evolution, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Apartado Postal 0843-03092 Panamá, República de Panamá; e-mail: millerma@si.edu

THE MIGRATION OF BIRDS: SEASONS ON THE WING. By Janice M. Hughes. Firefly Books, Buffalo, New York, USA. 2009: 208 pages, 76 color photographs, 27 maps and figures. ISBN: 13-978-1-55407-432-7. \$40.00 (hardcover with jacket).—The biological study of migration, specifically among birds, is an extremely diverse field of endeavor. Over the past hundred years the literature is filled with diverse views and studies, each attempting to explain one particular facet of migration. The author of this work attempts to unify the great number of studies contributing to the understanding of migration.

The book is divided into six broad chapters, each with its own strengths and shortfalls—as to be expected in any attempt to cover such a complex topic. Ten “Profiles” are presented, two per chapter. These vignettes deal with specific species or groups of species that exhibit similar migration patterns or experience similar migration difficulties.

The opening chapter, “Bird Migration through Human History,” was perhaps my personal favorite as it covered a great diversity of bird lore starting with mythological references, passing through classical references (such as Aristotle and Pliny the Elder) on to the treatise on falconry by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in the 13th Century. At this point we start to see the origins of a more scientific study of birds that progresses to the present century.

The second chapter, “The Five Ws of Avian Migration,” is the fuel for this amble through migration. It is here that the author introduces the reader to the varied aspects of bird migration. Researchers are occasionally and appropriately mentioned but there is a complete lack of reference citations. While this is undoubtedly a style preference for this type of book, citations would have made this a powerful chapter, instead of just an interesting one.

The third and fourth chapters, “The Phenomenon of Flight” and “Fueling the Migration,” provide interesting aspects regarding the anatomy and energetic needs of birds. Again, citations would have been appreciated.

“Finding the Way,” the fifth chapter meanders through the various ways that birds are believed to navigate. Here the reader is exposed to some classic experiments and studies in navigation. It is here that the anecdotal story of Cheri Ami should hold the reader on edge heading towards the ultimate chapter of the book. This World War I

carrier pigeon (*Columba livia*) earned “the *Croix de Guerre*, one of the country’s [France] highest honors for distinguished acts of heroism during combat.”

The final chapter, “Migratory Birds in Peril,” is really a one page overview followed by three birds with contemporary problems, a possibly extinct species (Eskimo Curlew [*Numenius borealis*]) and “An Indiscriminate Killer,” which discusses the role of lighthouses and radio towers as man-made migratory hazards.

A glossary is a welcomed addition to any book of a highly specific nature. The one in this book covers the basic terms with which most non-scientists would need help. While it is quite brief, it is well done and should be of use to the casual reader. Following the glossary is a section entitled “Further Reading.” This two page list of 33 books is inadequate for the topic, especially when considering three of the texts are reprints of Aristotle, Frederick II, and Pliny.

The writing throughout is well done and makes for enjoyable reading. The photographs are first-rate. This attractive combination draws the reader interested in migration deeper in, looking for more. But here it stops. The complete lack of references to the great number of studies that must have been consulted for this work will frustrate the reader in efforts to look elsewhere for greater detail.

While the author has attempted to cover the topic of migration thoroughly, I found it disturbing that Pliny the Elder garnered a citation in the index, whereas world-renowned migratory sites such as Point Pelee (Ontario), Whitefish Point (Michigan), Cape May (New Jersey), Malmo (Sweden), and Istanbul (Turkey), among others were lacking. This book is a cursory overview of a complex topic.

The appeal of this book will not be to the ornithological community due to the lack of referencing or detailed accounts of species or migration sites. It should, however, be in public libraries where it will have general audience appeal. Additionally, it will make a fine coffee-table book for the casual bird-watcher. Overall this book is best suited to middle school and high school libraries where young students will find it an interesting read, providing enough detail to stimulate interest. With adequate assistance, a student should be able to wade through the “Further Reading” section and continue on in studying the various aspects of migration.—MICHAEL A. KIELB, Visiting Lecturer,

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THE EASTERN SCREECH OWL: LIFE HISTORY, ECOLOGY, AND BEHAVIOR IN THE SUBURBS AND COUNTRYSIDE. By Frederick R. Gehlbach. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, Texas, USA. First Printing (1994). Second Printing (2008): 320 pages, 2 color, 36 black and white photos, 23 figures, and 27 tables. ISBN: (1994): 13-978-1-60344-121-6). ISBN (2008): 10-1-60344-121-2. \$24.95 (paperback).—I highly recommend reading this study if there is anything at all you want to know or think you might want to know about screech-owls. There is little here that I can think of that might be gleaned from natural history observations that might have been left out. The text contains 10 chapters, 10 appendices, 297 notes, an index, and about 315 references. This is the story of serious field research and intimate contact with individual screech-owls, and with their populations in central Texas. It is a study spanning 41 years, that included 1,453 banded owls. The author involved homeowners, birders, school children, and teachers. It is a comparison of suburban versus nearby rural populations that were studied concurrently. The bulk of the study, reported in the first printing of this book (in 1994) was completed between 1976 and 1987. The (2008) printing contains new findings. Some things had changed: eggs are now laid 5 days earlier in the season than reported earlier. Wooded suburban habitat has decreased 26% due to suburban sprawl in the study plots, and nesting pairs have decreased 21% although their nesting success is still high.

In Chapter 1, the Introduction, Gehlbach tells us how, as a youngster, he was first introduced to screech-owls. He was riding his bicycle in a city park after a softball game when he saw three fledglings perched out of reach on a branch above him. He “knocked each bird off” (page 3) with a softball. Years later the mystery of the owls he had discovered that day remained in his memory as he encountered a pair nesting in a “squirrel box.” (page 3). He soon made detailed observations and ended up putting up nest boxes and monitoring owls in several states (Ohio, New York, Michigan, New Mexico, Arizona, and also in Mexico). His close watch of the central Texas population that he reports started later, in 1967. In

the Introduction, he outlines his study approach and methods of his statistical analyses. In Chapter 2, he delineates the climate and weather, and the vegetation of his study sites with correlates of the owls’ choice of nest sites, as derived from nest boxes, as well as seasonal choice of roost sites. Chapters 3 and 4 examine food supplies and predation, and body weight and molt, respectively. The next three chapters concern details of nesting from eggs and chicks and their care to roles of males versus females during nesting. All of the data culminate in the last three chapters that concern lifetime reproduction and population structure, and comparisons of rural versus urban populations.

The wealth of detail is at times overwhelming, but each chapter has a summary page or two of ‘The Essentials’. One can thus skim through the book to areas of individual interest and refer back to the detailed quantifications and statistics in each chapter. The coverage is far too wide and too detailed for me to reiterate in a review, and perhaps it should not be done, because everyone will find their own field of interest represented. As in any long-term study, the goal is to try to find repeating patterns. This is the exciting game of natural history, but there are also always unanticipated surprises that go beyond the original goals. Although the primary stated goal of this study was to compare rural versus suburban populations—and a number of significant differences were documented—for me the most fascinating discoveries were the unintended. To cherry-pick a few perhaps arbitrary examples, I was most intrigued by documentation of a 9-year population cycle, which coincides with a lunar periodicity, and occurred in both rural and suburban owls. It has apparently also been documented for diurnal birds. Other interesting nuggets were that life-long monogamy was the rule, but sequential and concurrent polygyny occurred when food was plentiful and nesting density high. The rufous phase declined more than the gray phase in hard winters but increased following rainy years. Birds were the primary vertebrate prey of these sit-and-wait predators, but insects and reptiles were supplemental items. Blind snakes were taken into the nest as prey items but some survived in nests to live in a novel commensal association with the owls.

Gehlbach’s three major conclusions, (pages 192-193) are: (1) the screech-owl is “especially well-suited to coexistence with humans”, (2) “modern suburbia is quite munificent toward this

species... and [it] can utilize its resources”, and (3) “the amenity-pre-adaptation connections certainly modify some ideas about avian ecology.” Screech-owls are rather small owls and pre-adapted to live in the suburban environment as long as there are cavities and food that will satisfy a catholic diet. That said, the devil is, as almost always, in the details. And this book has plenty of them. As Gehlbach mentions himself (page 198): “I have learned much and perhaps even more from Eastern Screech Owls [*Megascops asio*]; but long-term events like population cycles need more time...” He continues to monitor the suburban population and writes (page 200): “Field experiments are possible now that I know the rules of the game” so the final phase of the investigation begins. He proposed that in the next few years he would use the owls in another study, in another city around a school curriculum to educate children (some of the owls were so habituated they would land on persons and one could reach under them to take eggs and chicks to examine and measure without disturbing the birds). These owls are an excellent study animal for children and the public to get familiar with wildlife, and through his birds he hopes to continue to promote an urban blend of nature and culture. Gehlbach’s practical directions for future comparative studies will raise awareness and help promote the provision of habitat and nesting sites for these charismatic birds, which are a barometer of some aspects of the urban environment.—BERND HEINRICH, Department of Biology, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05401, USA; e-mail: bernd.heinrich@uvm.edu

BIRDS OF EAST ASIA: CHINA, TAIWAN, KOREA, JAPAN, AND RUSSIA. By Mark Brazil. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 2009: 528 pages, 236 color plates, 2 pages line drawings, 2 maps, 950 distribution maps, family key, 2 appendices, index. ISBN: 978-0-691-13926-5. \$39.95 (paper); ISBN: 978-0-691-13925-8. \$79.50 (cloth).—When I first visited Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong in 1960 aboard the USS Helena (a heavy cruiser) as a freshly minted ensign in the U.S. Navy, there were no field guides covering any part of Asia. My only guide to the area was Keisuke Kobayashi’s “*Birds of Japan in Natural Colors*.” Although helpful because of its excellent illustrations, it was difficult to use as the text was in Japanese. Over the ensuing years, numerous books on the birds of eastern Asia

were published, including guides to the birds of China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea (but none for northeastern Russia). All of these books are useful and expand the knowledge of the birds in those areas. However, each has their drawbacks, one of the main ones being that they treat only the birds already known to have been found in the area covered. The gap that remained was a modern field guide that tied all of these areas together in a broad overview.

This new guide fills that void very well. It covers all the birds known to have occurred in northeastern Asia roughly east of longitude 116° E, thus all the coastal Chinese provinces north from Fujian (opposite Taiwan) to the Arctic Ocean and east to the Bering Sea, including northeastern Russia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and their satellite islands. Further, it is a competently executed field identification guide lavishly illustrated in the modern fashion with the text for each species facing its plate.

The use of “East” Asia in the title is both misleading and inaccurate as the guide is concerned only with “northeastern” Asia. None of southeastern Asia is covered. The brief introduction of 8 pages contains: Aims of this guide, Geographical scope, Taxonomy, Nomenclature, Bird identification, Bird habitats, Migration, Vagrancy, and How to use this book (which includes 2 pages of line drawings illustrating avian topography and terminology). This is followed by a 16-page key to the families with a color thumbnail portrait of a representative species from each family. The brief text for each family discusses general habits of the family members which will help place an unidentified bird in its family.

The bibliography lists only 16 titles. Since a work such as this requires use of hundreds of references, listing only a few seems pointless. However, the entire reference list (and other information about the book) can be found at: <http://sites.google.com/site/birdsofeastasia>. Appendix 1 is a useful table giving the status in five broad areas (Chinese coastal and northeastern provinces, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and northeastern Russia) of each of the species recorded in those areas. Appendix 2 is a list of 46 species considered likely to occur eventually in northeastern Asia.

All 969 species known to have occurred in northeastern Asia are illustrated in color paintings on 236 color plates. An additional 16 species that are expected to turn up are illustrated in the plates,

as well as eight extinct species. Each plate displays 2–8 species with 1–11 images/species. The entire text for each species is opposite its plate and consists of a small (2.2 × 2.1 cm) range map in seven colors, length, wingspan and weight, distribution, habitat and habits, identification, bare parts, and vocalizations. Some have taxonomic notes or alternate English names. On the same line with the title ‘English name’ is a useful code indicating in which of the five geographical areas covered the bird has occurred. By using tiny print, a large amount of information was crammed into the text for each species. However, for some complex groups such as large gulls and diurnal birds of prey, the book’s format is crippling as it does not allow a sufficiently long text. The taxonomy throughout is up to date and forward-looking.

The color plates were executed by 14 artists, resulting in uneven quality, most in the good to very good level with some in the excellent to superb range. With only a few exceptions, their goal of enabling identification is attained. Females and immatures are illustrated where they differ from the adult male, as are the more different subspecies, offering mostly complete coverage of plumage variation. All individual images are identified by age, male or female, and often subspecies. Where identification characteristics are revealed only or best in flight, inserts of birds in flight are given. The artists responsible for each plate are listed only in the copyrights section on the backside of the title page. I believe the name of the artist responsible for each plate should be displayed prominently either on the plate itself or on its facing page. Some of the plates I found most satisfying are: Alan Harris’s diurnal raptors, Brian Small’s bush-warblers through *Acrocephalus* warblers, and Ren Hathaway’s large thrushes. I am uncomfortable with the brush strokes in many of Dave Nurney’s birds, as well as the odd postures and proportions and too-large heads of some of his birds. Some comments by plate follow.

Plate 22. While the text correctly notes the crown and nape of the adult Pacific Loon (Diver) (*Gavia pacifica*) is noticeably paler than the Black-throated Loon (Diver) (*G. arctica*), the plate has this reversed and the difference diminished, likely due to using specimens rather than field experience, as the contrast is accentuated in the brighter light in the field.

Plate 41. The underwing pattern of both adult and immature Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus*

philippensis) is inaccurate. It should have a rather banded appearance with white greater and median underwing coverts contrasting with vinous (adult) or dusky brown (immature) lesser underwing coverts and dusky brown (looking paler or darker depending on light angle) primaries and secondaries. The outer primaries are blackish.

Plate 46. Adult and immature labels are switched on Eastern Osprey (*Pandion cristatus*).

Plate 48. I had the privilege of seeing an adult of the ‘niger’ subspecies (or morph) of Steller’s Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*) in South Korea on 3 January 1962 and aver this entirely black eagle with its huge yellow bill and white tail could not possibly be mistaken for anything else, contra the text.

Plate 52. While the crest of the Crested Goshawk (*Accipiter trivirgatus*) in the wind could possibly look like the plate rendition, it normally lies flat on the nape with the tip slightly above the nape (perhaps 2 mm.) and just barely visible.

Plate 54. The complexity of the plumages of the buzzards (*Buteo*) can only be hinted at in the space available here, e.g., the individual tail feathers of most Upland Buzzards (*B. hemilasius*) are white in the center and darker on the edges so that the tail looks mostly white when spread and darker when closed.

Plate 59. While the flight picture of Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*) accurately depicts this bird’s ‘jizz’, the walking bird is both badly misshapen and too large (should be smaller than Band-bellied Crake [*P. paykullii*]).

Plate 65. The specific name of European Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) is misspelled (*aricaria* rather than *apricaria*).

Plate 69. Neither mentioned in the text nor pictured properly is the fact the white flank feathers of the Greater Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) in flight curve up and over the sides of the base of the tail to give a distinctive Ruff-like pattern.

Plate 71. The width of the white band on the tips of the secondaries of the Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) and Wilson’s Snipe (*G. delicata*) are different and incorrectly depicted (switched) in the plate (correct in text).

Plate 90. Missing in text is the fact that Relict Gull (*Ichthyaelus relictus*) often forages along shore like a shorebird.

Plate 104. The Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) is pictured and listed as a species that might turn up in northeastern Asia. However, there is a record for Ildilya Island in

Koluchia Bay on the northern Chukotka Peninsula (Dement'ev et al. 1951, *Birds of the Soviet Union*).

Plate 115. Eastern Grass Owl (*Tyto longimembris*) text and plates depict only buffy phase. White phase has white underparts and white upperside of tail with narrow black bars.

Plate 120. The text account of Brown Hawk-Owl (*Ninox scutulata*) is a bit muddled. My 2002 paper (Bulletin B.O.C. 122: 250–257) on this species complex showed the song of the migratory northern race *japonica* is the same throughout its range and different from the resident races in southern Asia. I recommended splitting them based on vocalizations as well as some morphometric differences. The resident subspecies *totogo* (southern Japan and Taiwan) is close to *japonica* both vocally and morphometrically with a weak potential for a split. Brazil chose to split the *japonica* subspecies into eastern *japonica* and western *florensis* and suggests that only *japonica* might be separate from *scutulata*, which doesn't make sense (*japonica* and *florensis* have identical vocalizations and similar morphometrics, which are consistently distinct from the subspecies of *scutulata*). The English name I suggested in my paper, Northern Boobook, is mentioned, but the paper is not listed in the online bibliography.

Plates 127, 130. The colors of Rufous (*Celeus brachyurus*), Pale-headed (*Gecinulus grantia*), and Bay (*Blythipicus pyrrhotis*) woodpeckers are very badly off.

Plate 133. Heads of Tiger Shrikes (*Lanius tigrinus*) are much too big.

It should be noted that any new work with as broad a sweep as this one, and its consequent massive number of data points, inevitably has short-comings. That this one has so few is a tribute to the care and expertise applied to the project by the author. It is remarkable indeed that the book is so far along the route to perfection on its first try.

This guide covers its area quite thoroughly, enough so, that I would be quite comfortable carrying it as my only guide in its geographic range. Further, it will be quite useful in the Philippines and Indonesia. Birders throughout Eurasia and North America will find it helpful for identifying strays. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in Asian birds and expect to be using it in my Asian jaunts.—BEN F. KING, Ornithology Department, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, NY 10024, USA; e-mail: kingbirdtours@earthlink.net