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Seven Names for the Bellbird: Conservation Geography in Honduras

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Handbook of Bird Biology, Second Edition.—Sandy Podulka, Ronald W. Rohrbaugh Jr., and Rick Bonney [editors]. 2004. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 1328 pp. ISBN 0-938-02762-X. $99.50 (cloth).

At nearly eight pounds, this mammoth book will surely slow students down as they cross campus. As a result of its size, this text has the capacity to present a comprehensive view of avian biology. Fifteen well-known ornithologists (their names are within parentheses in the following list) contributed chapters on all major topics in bird biology, including humans and birds (Sandra Podulka, Marie Eckhardt, and Daniel Otis), the world of birds (Kevin McGowan), bird watching (Stephen Kress), external anatomy (George Clark Jr.), anatomy and physiology (Howard Evans and J. B. Heiser), flight and migration (Kenneth Able), evolution (Alan Feduccia), ethology (John Alcock), sound (Donald Kroodsma), breeding biology (David Winkler), ecology (Stanley Temple) and conservation (John Fitzpatrick). The book is marketed alone and as a component of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Home Study Course in Bird Biology.

The excellent illustrations and photographs are profuse and appear to include almost all topics a professor might want to share with students. Donald Kroodsma's chapter on vocal behavior is particularly outstanding and is accompanied by a compact disc to further illustrate vocalizations. Sadly missing from the book, however, is any color, with all illustrations and photographs in black-and-white. Color certainly is one of the attractions of bird biology; too bad that Cornell did not package its *Birds of North America* CD-ROM with this book.

For a book this size (over 1300 pages), I found the 28-page index insufficient, and therefore somewhat frustrating to use. Take, for example, the physiology of cold tolerance. Physiology is not in the index (although it is a chapter title), nor is cold. I finally stumbled onto relevant pages when I found a reference to torpor. Subjects in physiology are covered adequately, but not in great depth. For example, birds' use of fat reserves for migration is mentioned, but not the biochemical pathways involved.

Perhaps more serious is the relative paucity of references within the text. References appear at the end of some chapters, in the form of a short list of suggested readings of related books and representative recent articles. Roughly 800 sources are cited in a reference section at the end of the book. This number of references may seem impressive until one realizes the breadth of information packed within the book's many pages. I was surprised to note, for example, that George Lowery's seminal work on trans-gulf and continent-wide migration was omitted from the references.

The book includes a table that lists species mentioned in the text, along with their scientific names. Frustratingly, the list omits page and chapter references for the species. More satisfying is a glossary of avian terminology, which does include both chapter and page citations, along with short definitions.

In my opinion, this book seems to target undergraduates (or very committed nontraditional learners). The text is extremely well written and engaging, and occasionally includes first person accounts. The chapters are replete with sidebars to capture the reader's interest. I immediately focused on an essay about my mentor, the late Roxie Laybourne, the Smithsonian's feather expert. The limited number of references is problematic for graduate students and other serious scholars. For nonacademic readers, the $99.50 price may appear steep. However, it is reasonable and comparable to the much shorter, alternative ornithology texts by either Welty and Baptista (1988, Thompson Learning, Inc.) or Gill (1995, W. H. Freeman). On the other hand, the Handbook's profusion of illustrations, up-to-date information, and breadth of coverage make it extremely attractive. The Handbook's conundrum, if one considers its audience to be undergraduates, is its dauntingly large size. It is difficult to imagine the average undergraduate student reading this book cover-to-cover. Clearly the book is aimed at those birders who are committed enough to consider enrolling in Cornell's home study course. Despite the inadequate referencing and because of its wealth of information, this tome should be on every serious ornithologist's book shelf.—DAN TALLMAN, Department of Biology, Northern State University, Aberdeen, SD 57401. E-mail: tallmand@northern.edu

Seven Names for the Bellbird: Conservation Geography in Honduras.—Mark Bonta. 2003. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX. 250 pp., 35 b&w photos, 4 maps. ISBN 1-58544-249-6. $35.00 (cloth).

In this book, Mark Bonta recounts his experiences living and working as a Peace Corps volunteer and cultural geographer in the eastern Honduran province of Olancho during the 1990s. He artfully blends tales of his explorations of the tropical birds and landscapes with intimate accounts of the people he lived with and learned from during this time. Through recounting his experiences in rural Olancho, he directly attempts to dispel any beliefs upheld by the reader that the general populace of Honduras, and consequently much of the rest of tropical America, are adamantly destructive towards nature, ignorant or hateful of biodiversity, or otherwise careless stewards of the environment. Instead, he demonstrates that a positive cultural disposition toward birds, ''ornithophilia'' as he coins it, is rooted in a deep appreciation for nature by the Honduran people, and that ongoing, massive habitat destruction is primarily the consequence of deteriorating economic and sociopolitical conditions. He strongly advocates that conservationists working in the Neotropics should pay better attention to, and work more closely with, rural societies in areas they are attempting to conserve, and that such actions will ultimately yield more productive and longer lasting conservation solutions.

In the first chapter, the author introduces us to the term ''conservation geography,'' which blends together the studies of cultural geography and conservation biology at the landscape level. He offers this as a new conservation paradigm that does not necessarily attempt to distinguish between what is natural and what is man-made, but instead incorporates the human landscape within the natural landscape, and recognizes the

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value, impact, and role that humans have on nature at various levels. Through his application of conservation geography, the author brings to our attention an important aspect of Neotropical bird conservation—the everyday appreciation of birds in Honduran and other Latino cultures, and the consequent caring for, protection, and management of birds and their habitats in the vicinity of people living in rural Latin America. This, he maintains, is too often overlooked and underappreciated for its conservation value.

In order to provide a background for his case, the author provides a brief history of the unique influence birds and natural resources had on the European settlement of Honduras. Through numerous interesting and well-documented anecdotes, he demonstrates how birds and natural resources are woven into the fabric of Honduran culture, both past and present, and how the colonial and modern economy have affected land-use and land-ownership patterns, and consequently the natural landscape. He also remarks on how social marginalization is often at the root of natural resource exploitation, especially by the rural farmer.

Much of the book contains brief yet colorful accounts of the author's interactions with local Olanchanos (people of the Olancho province). He vividly describes his encounters with them, sometimes discussing their recent bird sightings, and at other times teaming up with them in adventuresome pursuits of rare birds. He also tells of children discovering, studying, and often caring for birds and their nests. He provides examples of certain economic activities that allow many species to coexist on the land, and how many private landowners value and protect the birds and habitats on their lands, and thus contribute to conservation. These tales all serve to illustrate the intimate relationship and connections between rural Hondurans and their environment, and how the human and natural dimensions of their world blend harmoniously into one. Through his description of the day-to-day life of some rural Olanchano families, he demonstrates the importance of birds and nature to individual happiness and economic well being, and in turn how these families create and preserve habitat, and appreciate and protect birds.

Throughout the book, the author provides valuable advice for any biologist or conservationist venturing to work in the Neotropics. Especially useful is his list in the final chapter of ''dos and don'ts'' for people interested in engaging in Neotropical biodiversity conservation. These simple rules can help people avoid some of the pitfalls that often stymie conservation projects in Central and South America, and having such advice readily available will undoubtedly be incredibly helpful for any foreigner working in this region. Throughout the book the author makes good use of local Honduran names, which helps paint a picture for the reader of the birds and landscapes that touch the everyday lives of rural Hondurans. He also stresses the importance of learning and using local names for birds, habitats, and landscapes, and how by doing so, outsiders can better relate to and engage local people.

The author is careful to state that what he upholds in this book is not the salvation for all species facing extinction or extirpation in the Neotropics, but instead serves as an example of how people and nature can coexist harmoniously. He rightly states that far too many well-intentioned conservationists ignore local knowledge, culture, and appreciation for nature when attempting to implement conservation initiatives in the Neotropics. Instead, he maintains that conservation strategies that are guided by knowledge of how natural landscapes function within the broader cultural landscape will ultimately be more successful.

However, because most stories in the book point to positive conservation outcomes involving generalist species, the author's message can come off as being a bit idealistic and superficial. And this is despite the fact that in the beginning of the book the author openly attempts to dissuade any such impression by stating that he is not attempting ''to prove that birds have secure futures in Neotropical landscapes that. . . are ravaged by human pressures.'' However, rarely does he delve into the relationships between his human subjects and the numerous species that do not easily coexist in landscapes changed by humans, and because of this, the book can come off as being a bit one-sided. Also, the author does not offer actual examples of how rural ornithophilia can be applied to help ''stop the deforestation frontier'' in Honduras, which he does advocate, while simultaneously allowing people and nature to coexist along this boundary. Granted, examples of such solutions may be rare, and at no point in the book does the author claim to have the answer to such problems.

Regardless, this book is a must read for any biologist or conservationist working in the Neotropics. At 160 pages, the author's narrative style makes the text quick and easy reading. Maps are included that help the reader orient and familiarize themselves with the landscape, and an array of black-and-white photographs in the middle of the text help bring the people and places alive. Additional material at the end of the text includes an appendix of birds recorded in Olancho through 2002 (along with their Latin, English, and local names), extensive footnotes from each chapter, a glossary of Spanish terms (including translations of local bird names), a bibliography, and a rather exhaustive index.—ARVIND O. PANJABI, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO 80603-8311. E-mail: arvind.panjabi@rmbo.org

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