



## BOOK REVIEWS

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**Birds of the Southwest.**—John H. Rappole. 2000. Texas A&M University Press, College Station. 329 pp., 43 black-and-white photos, 456 color photos, 454 range maps. ISBN 0-89096-957-4. \$17.95 (paper), ISBN 0-89096-958-2. \$39.95 (cloth).

*Birds of the Southwest* covers a vast, scenic region of the United States with an equally appealing and diverse avifauna. The areas encompassed range from coastal habitats and deserts to canyons and forested mountains with tundra-shrouded peaks.

The first thing that catches the reader's attention when picking up the book is the singing Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) on the cover. I found this a perplexing sight, since the Dickcissel is by no means a characteristic bird of the Southwest. As the author states inside, this species is a rare summer resident and fall transient that occurs only on the Southwest's eastern fringe. Unfortunately, the photo on the cover is not this book's only shortcoming, as lapses in attention to detail are surprisingly numerous throughout much of the book.

The book begins with a brief overview of landforms, climate, and the diverse habitats of the Southwest, which includes southern California, the southern tip of Nevada, and Arizona and New Mexico. The habitats are illustrated with 43 black-and-white photographs scattered throughout the book. Each photograph includes a caption of where the picture was taken and a short list of birds characteristic of the area.

The introductory section is followed by 32 pages containing color photographs of 456 birds. Many of the photos are striking, while others are so poor they offer little help to someone attempting to identify the species. Surprisingly, more than 15 photographs are misidentified, and a few others are debatable as to what species they are. Some of the more obvious examples include the photographs labeled as Surfbird (*Aphriza virgata*), which is actually an American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*), Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*), which is a Dickcissel, and Olive Warbler (*Peucedramus taeniatus*), which is a House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)! The photograph numbering was set up to correspond to the species accounts; however, the numbering is incorrect from Gilded Flicker (*Colaptes chrysoides*) on, since the photograph labeled as Gila Woodpecker (*Melanerpes uropygialis*) is actually a Gilded Flicker and there is no photo of a Gila Woodpecker.

The remainder of the text is devoted to species accounts for 457 of the regularly occurring species within the region. Each account is necessarily brief given the number of species covered, and includes information on description, voice, habitat, abundance, and distribution. Where possible, at least one location in each state where the species can be found is noted. Unfortunately, the locations chosen are often not the easiest

sites at which to find the species, and some are simply incorrect. For example, Canyon de Chelly National Monument is noted as a location where Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*) can be seen in Arizona. However, as coordinator of the Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas, I know this resident species can only be found in the higher elevations of the White Mountains nearly 240 km to the south. As another example, it is very unlikely that anyone could find a Botteri's Sparrow (*Aimophila botterii*) at any of the three locations listed for this species in southeastern Arizona.

Small regional range maps accompany nearly all the species accounts. The ranges are broken down into four categories: summer, migration, winter, and permanent. The species ranges described in the text often do not match those depicted in the corresponding maps, which are often incorrect or misleading. For example, Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*), Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*), and Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) are depicted as summer residents along the lower Colorado River, where they actually occur only as transients.

Appendix 1 lists 152 casual and accidental species that have occurred in the Southwest, but omits some 20 species documented in the region. One of the more useful parts of the book is Appendix 2, which gives very brief directions to more than 400 of the well-known and not-so-well-known birding locales mentioned in the species accounts.

Many of the references listed at the end of the book are excellent sources of information; however, a surprising number are outdated or of questionable accuracy. The author used many local checklists to determine species occurrences. Unfortunately, many park, monument, refuge, and national forest bird checklists lack expert review and therefore include incorrect information. Reference to a number of more recent and excellent books that are readily available could have greatly reduced the number of errors in this book. For Arizona alone, these books include *Birds of Phoenix and Maricopa County, Arizona* (Witzeman et al., 1997, Maricopa Audubon Society, Phoenix) and *Birds of the Lower Colorado River Valley* (Rosenberg et al., 1991, University of Arizona Press, Tucson).

The price of the book is quite attractive and the general focus is good. However, *Birds of the Southwest* does not include any new information for the average birder already possessing field guides and good reference books to the region. Novice or potential birders interested in an introduction to the birds of the region may find the book useful if they do not rely too heavily on the range maps and use an actual field guide to help identify the species.—TROY E. CORMAN, Nongame Branch, Arizona Game and Fish Department, 2221 West Greenway Road, Phoenix, AZ 85023, E-mail: tcorman@gf.state.az.us