

F O C U S

A California Birder's Library



Rich Stallcup

AFTER BINOCULARS, A FIELD ornithologist's most important tool is an arsenal of books. Because the market is flooded with bird books (the Los Angeles Audubon Bookstore lists 100 titles for North America alone, and that is but a fraction of the number in print), one could spend a fortune buying a selection and still not have the right ones. Birding has become so popular in the last 15 years that almost any publishing effort in the field will be successful. Thus, as anyone would guess, a lot of useless volumes are on the shelves.

Presented here is a list of books which we feel California birders should have or at least be aware of. Many are interesting and useful to birders elsewhere in the world, too. Some are out of print and difficult to find, but persistence and use of book dealer/finder services that advertise in periodicals such as *American Birds* will result in success.

Technical References & General Subjects

THE LIFE OF BIRDS by Joel Carl Welty. The best of the ornithological textbooks (college course stuff), well referenced.

HANDBOOK OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS by Ralph S. Palmer, Volumes 1, 2, and 3. For each species treated (loons through waterfowl), there is a general introduction, thorough description including all plumages and molt sequence, discussion of subspecies, field identification, voice, habitat, and food.

CHECKLIST OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS, American Ornithologists' Union. The 1957 5th edition covers North America north of Mexico, and Greenland, Bermuda, and Baja, giving distributions for subspecies. The 1983 6th edition and its 35th supplement in *Auk* 102:680-686 cover North America from the Arctic through Panama, plus the West Indies, and Hawaii without treatment of subspecies because of the huge geographical area. These books are the phylogenetic, distributional lists to follow.

THE AUDUBON SOCIETY ENCYCLOPEDIA OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS by John K. Terres. Nearly a million words and 6000 alphabetical entries and cross references; life histories of 847 birds; 875 superb color photos; and an amazing bibliography: an awesome book. The most



thorough ornithological publication ever. Just read it (ahem) and see.

RARE BIRDS OF THE WEST COAST by Don Roberson. A listing of all records of rare birds as defined by the book for Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California through the year 1979, with fun pictures, theories, and I.D. hints.

THE DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN BIRD NAMES by Ernest A. Coate. The best of the books interpreting names of birds both scientific and common, with an excellent Biographical Appendix.

A GUIDE TO BIRD BEHAVIOR, Vols. I & II, by Donald and Lillian Stokes. For selected common species, what birds do, not just what they are.

AUDUBON SOCIETY HANDBOOK FOR BIRDERS by Stephen W. Kress. Almost all you want to know about birding strategy and utensils.

A NEW DICTIONARY OF BIRDS by A. Landsborough Thompson. A nice world-of-birds treatise. Freshly re-released.

THE BIRDS OF CANADA by W. Earl Godfrey. Great color plates, especially of waders and *Empidonax*.

Birds in California

BIRDS OF THE PACIFIC STATES by Ralph Hoffman. The first real field guide for the west, with sensitive personal insight glowing through the words. Written vocalizations as good as any.

BIRDS OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA—AN ANNOTATED FIELD LIST by McCaskie, DeBenedictis, Erickson, and Morlan. A must-have booklet on status and distribution.

BIRDS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA—STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION by Garrett & Dunn. Just what the title says and much more.

BIRDS OF THE YOSEMITE SIERRA by David Gaines. A scientific and enlightening view of the birds of the "snowy range" and the Mono Basin. Presently being updated.

CATALOG OF CALIFORNIA SEABIRD COLONIES by Arthur L. Souls *et al.* Concise report of all the seabirds nesting on islands and islets along the California coast.

THE AVIFAUNA OF THE SOUTH FARALLON ISLANDS, CALIFORNIA by DeSante & Ainley. A collection of records of some 346 species of birds as of 1979, recorded on a rock 43 kilometers west of San Francisco.

DISCOVERING SIERRA BIRDS by Beedy & Granholm. Great things about the Sierra in general and its birdlife, with excellent art by Keith Hansen and other art by others.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE BIRDS OF CALIFORNIA, 1944, by Grinnel & Miller. The distributional list upon which many later works were based. Lots of fun-to-browse old records of species and sub-species statewide.

BIRDS OF SONOMA COUNTY by Bolander & Parmeter. Annotated list with bar graphs for seasonal timing.

BIRDS OF SANTA BARBARA AND VENTURA COUNTIES by Webster, Lehman & Bevier. Annotated list with bar graphs for seasonal timing.

BIRDS OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY by Phil Unitt. A very thorough county guide.

Field Guides

THE AUDUBON SOCIETY MASTER GUIDE TO BIRDING edited by John Farrand Jr. Three volumes almost puts it out of the field guide category, but the identification information they contain is state-of-the-art. All the regular species on the AOU list are illustrated, most with

color photographs.

FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA, National Geographic Society. Aside from the facts that some illustrations are poor, e.g., swallows and *Empidonax* flycatchers, and that the maps do not demonstrate migration routes, this is the best single-book guide we've got. A somewhat better, revised edition is already being worked up.

A GUIDE TO FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA by *Robbins et al.* A very good guide especially when used in conjunction with *Birds For Real* by Stallcup. The best maps for the U.S. and Canada.

A FIELD GUIDE TO WESTERN BIRDS by *Roger Tory Peterson*. The first and still a great field book. Look for a wholly new edition to appear soon.

A FIELD GUIDE TO NESTS, EGGS AND YOUNG OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS by *Harrison*. The best and only book on the subject.

A FIELD GUIDE TO WESTERN BIRDS' NESTS by *Harrison*. If you have it, you'll use it.

Specific Groups

GULLS, A GUIDE TO IDENTIFICATION by *P. J. Grant*. Great on the subject with loads of photos of many plumages of each species. Palearctic only, it omits a couple of our birds like Western and California Gulls.

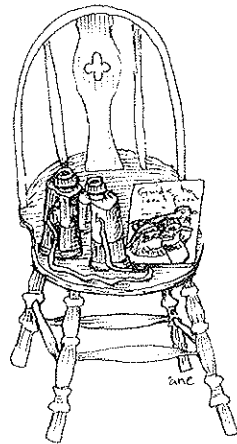
SEABIRDS, AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE by *Peter Harrison*. The shapes of many birds illustrated are unrealistic, but this is the best book on the subject and contains all the world species including grebes and cormorants!

GUIDE TO THE IDENTIFICATION AND AGEING OF Holarctic WADERS by *Prater et al.* A bander's handbook with plumage details and biometrics. Many good tips for field identification on each species.

SHOREBIRDS: IDENTIFICATION GUIDE TO THE WADERS OF THE WORLD by *Marchant and Prater*. This book is due out in late 1985 and is bound to be excellent given what we've seen from the authors in the past.

PELAGIC BIRDS OF MONTEREY BAY by *Rich Stallcup*. A small, cheap, and useful booklet. Most species from the Northeast Pacific discussed.

WATERFOWL OF THE WORLD by *Frank Todd*. Magnificent and thoroughly illustrated (including photographs of the now



extinct Pink-headed Duck). Coffee table type book.

SEABIRDS OF THE EASTERN NORTH PACIFIC AND ARCTIC WATERS edited by *Delphine Haley*. A grand anthology about the ocean species off our coast. Good scientific monographs by seabird biologists. Neat photos and maps. Coffee table type.

Finding Birds

A BIRDER'S GUIDE TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA by *Jim Lane*. Revised in 1985. Directions to most of the region's best birding spots and what might be found there.

A BIRDER'S CALIFORNIA by *Don Roberson*. Birding hot spots and a strategy for building a state list.

GUIDE TO BIRD FINDING WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI by *Olin Pettinghill*. General information and specific localities all around the west for travelling birders.

BIRDING LOCATIONS IN AND AROUND LOS ANGELES by *Jean Brandt*. If you have to be in L.A., this neat guide directs you to where the wild things still are.

BIRDING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BAY, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society. No, you don't need scuba gear: this is for bird spots around the south end of San Francisco Bay.

SAN FRANCISCO PENINSULA BIRD-WATCHING, Sequoia Audubon Society. All the good spots and what may be there.

Periodicals

AMERICAN BIRDS, National Audubon Society. A massive archive of country-wide bird records for many decades, lately with excellent I.D. stuff like "Field identification of the smaller sandpipers within the genus *Calidris*" by Veit and Jonsson in Vol. 38:5.

CONTINENTAL BIRDLIFE, *Kenn Kaufman*, editor. No longer published, but every issue you find will be of value to you, with I.D. articles like "Status and

identification of forms of White Wagtail in western North America" by Joseph Morlan in Vol. 2:2.

WESTERN BIRDS (formerly CALIFORNIA BIRDS), Western Field Ornithologists. Loads of great bird material through the years with some classic I.D. articles like "Identification of the Yellow-billed Loon" by Binford and Rensen in Volume 5:11.

BIRDING, The American Birding Association. A lot of lister-twitcher silliness, but many diagnostic notes on distribution, taxonomy, and I.D., like those on Storm-Petrels of the world by Ron Naveen.

POINT REYES BIRD OBSERVATORY NEWSLETTER. Excellent summaries of scientific studies, conservation issues, and, in the "Focus" column which you already know all about, bird identification.

THE WESTERN Tanager, newsletter of the Los Angeles Audubon Society. Well worth reading the last ten years' worth of issues. Very good articles on foreign travel, conservation, science-made-easy, and identification of difficult western birds by Jon Dunn and Kimball Garret.

THAT'S IT. YOU MAY have other preferences, and many more titles worth having will no doubt soon appear. Just remember, as the old Sage Grouse once said, "When the book differs from the bird, believe the bird."

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