

Book Reviews

Book Review Editor's Note: We are continuing to use the current currency codes. Thus Canadian dollars are CAD, U.S. dollars are USD, Euros are EUR, China Yuan Remimbi are CNY, Australian dollars are AUD and so on.

ZOOLOGY

Birds of North America and Greenland

By Norman Arlott. 2011. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540-5237. 224 pages. 15.95 USD. Paper.

North America has some very fine field guides to the birds. After the original Peterson [and still the best for beginners] we have been given Audubon, Golden, National Geographic, Sibley and Crossley Guides to choose from. So why do we need another guide to the birds of North America?

I have to admit I am a fan of Norman Arlott's books. I have used his guides in other parts of the world with success. The author normally covers a larger range than most books. By restricting the number and size of illustrations he keeps the books small and therefore more portable. This applies to this his latest book that is only 19 cm × 13 cm × 1.5 cm.

Arlott's illustrations are typically accurate. Birds are the correct shape and posture showing the author has field experience as an observer. He is careful and detailed in depicting the finer points of the bird's plumage. However, I had only reached plate 2 when I saw a critical error; the bill of the Snow Goose is missing the gape, essential for separating it from Ross's Goose. As I poked on I noticed more inconsistencies, like the wrong colour for American Woodcock and Upland Sandpiper. In fact many of the plates are over coloured [see Cedar Waxwing]. The critical beak shape is wrong for Hoary Redpoll. The differential colour of House and Purple Finch is non-existent.

The author uses European names – but this is a guide to North America. The Knot is not a Knot on this side of the Atlantic – it is a Red Knot. Worse, *Gavia immer* is not a diver but is a loon; ask any Canadian [The index does list loon and diver]. Why write a book and not use the official names?

The book is also out-of-date. Earlier this year I officially ticked the Pacific Wren, after it had been split from Winter Wren. This is mentioned only as a subspecies. Other splits, like Gallinule and Moorhen, are also missed. AOU name changes like Nelson's Sparrow [changed in 2009] are incorrect. Tree Sparrow is the European Tree Sparrow [the second name in parentheses].

The range maps are very small, about 1.4 cm square, but readable. This is the only way you can define the birds of Greenland, because they are rarely identified in the text. A list of birds of Greenland would have been most useful. Worse Snowy Owl has a winter and summer range, but the Hawk Owl has only a year-round resident status. The southward drift in winter is ignored.

The text is short, but inconsistent. Some vagrants have a short description [e.g., vagrant to Alaska], but others do not. The Lapwing, for example, is listed as a "vagrant from Europe." It would have been easy and useful to add "to north-eastern coast, primarily Newfoundland." The Hawfinch is also designated a vagrant from Europe, where as a rare bird in Alaska it is better termed a vagrant from Asia.

It is sad that an author of Arlott's ability has wasted his talent on a error-filled book. He could have written a portable guide to areas where the need is greater, such as the Middle East or Brazil. These would have filled in a real gap, rather than add to the over-stuffed North American market. I do not recommend this book to beginners, but experienced, travelling birders may find the size convenient. Disappointing.

ROY JOHN

2193 Emard Crescent, Ottawa, K1J 6K5