

BOOK REVIEW

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Distributional Checklist of North American Birds. 1986. David DeSante and Peter Pyle. Artemisia Press, P. O. Box 119, Lee Vining, CA 93541. xiv + 442 pp., 54 pen and ink sketches. \$29.95 (includes postage and handling); California residents add 6% sales tax.

This is a volume of many purposes. Perhaps it is not a great success in any one of them, but in combination the volume will offer something to many. Because it is a somewhat odd amalgam, it is a volume you may wish to examine before purchasing.

The format: a grid, with the species down the left side and the provinces and states of Canada and the United States across the top. If a species has occurred in a particular area, the corresponding square contains a simple code (e.g., "uS" stands for "uncommon in summer") showing the species' status in that province or state. The grid is complete, and that is probably the way it should be, but you can imagine the number of blank squares in the tubenoses and alcid.

The authors offer three purposes. First, the work is to present a compendium of annotated state and province lists. In a limited fashion, its success is great. The authors have expended considerable effort to define the easily understood but precise code system and to be thorough; they contacted many regional authorities for review. While this one volume conveniently satisfies a wide-ranging curiosity, it can satisfy only a limited one. Thus, if you want to know the status of any species to the level of "uS," the book works well; if you wish to know more, head to the library to consult the works listed in the bibliography at the back of the book.

The second purpose is to provide a means for keeping life, state, and province lists. The grid squares, measuring 1.4×1 cm, offer adequate space to check off your life sighting, but you will need a rapidograph to enter any further detail. Still, a happy lister with a set of colored felt pens could probably have much fun.

The third purpose is akin to the first. The hope seems to be that the consistency provided by one set of authors using a set system will allow useful inter-region comparisons and provide a data base for studies of changes in avian distribution in North America. Whether or not I am correct in questioning the premises behind the authors' purpose, it is unlikely that this is a purpose relevant to the concerns of many potential purchasers.

The authors offered three purposes; I add a fourth: visual pleasure. Fifty-four full-page illustrations are roughly split between Keith Hansen and F. P. Bennett, Jr., and remind one that birds can look terrific in plain ol' black ink. While liking Bennett's bold images greatly, I was especially impressed with the imagination shown in Hansen's compositions. Both are to be commended particularly for the faithful matching of the background to the species illustrated. While I feel I must stop just short of recommending purchasing this

volume solely for the art, if the book appeals to you for any other reason, the illustrations will reward you for years to come.

Purchasers will undoubtedly find other uses. As one friend noted, the book can be the foundation for many games of birder trivia. In how many states has Western Kingbird not been recorded? If you want the answer, or suspect the answer is of the type you will often want answered, buy the book.



Black-capped Chickadee

Sketch by Steve Riddle