

## BOOK REVIEWS

Beyond these concerns, there is not much to criticize. Gulls offer so much potential for discussion, and even heated argument, that I will refrain from trying to pick too many nits, and besides, I didn't find many to pick. I would have preferred a longer introduction though, covering more aspects of gull identification. More emphasis might have been made of the amazing variation in plumage that gulls exhibit, or of the often striking size differences between the sexes (covered in passing in a few species accounts). Environmental variables, such as lighting and its effect on perception of gray tones (touched upon in some accounts), also could have had greater exposure.

In the introduction, the examples chosen to show differences in the gonydeal angle were, unfortunately, underwhelming, and while the narration talked about "primary projection" as primaries beyond the tertials, the on-screen pointers showed "primary projection" beyond the tail; this feature was also called "wingtip projection" in the video. A single, consistent definition might help. On several occasions the narration and images were not compatible, e.g., the "barely evident pale window" on the wings of the first-year California Gull shown looks barely different from the "prominent" window of the Herring Gull used for comparison. Closer attention to such discrepancies, of which there were several, might lessen rather than compound the feeling of bewilderment that some birding friends of mine have for gulls. Another cut at editing also might have removed phrases such as "with which it superficially resembles."

In general, well-marked examples were chosen for each species. It would be hard at best, however, to distinguish one of the first-year Glaucous-winged Gulls from a Glaucous  $\times$  Herring hybrid on the brief view available, and one of the still photos of a flying Kelp Gull looks like a Dolphin Gull (note the long tail, very broad white trailing edge to the wings, and apparently smoky gray head and dark bill). Mention might have been made of the regular occurrence of apparent Herring  $\times$  Glaucous-winged gulls south to California and of their disturbing similarity to Thayer's Gull. Indeed, the problem of hybrids, especially for west-coast observers, could have benefited from longer and less hurried treatment.

The overwhelming benefits of this video far outweigh any negative comments, though, and in particular I was impressed by how it makes manageable what might seem an almost impossible task: clearly covering the identification points of large gulls in North America. But before you feel too confident, the video ends with the very responsible caveat that not all gulls are identifiable!

This video was an ambitious undertaking, and it provides a wealth of information that seems certain to teach expert and beginner something new. I commend the producer and all involved for providing a highly educational tool. Anyone who looks at gulls, at any level, would do well to own this video, and to watch it many, many times.

Steve N. G. Howell

**A Guide to the Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds**, 2nd ed., by Paul J. Baicich and Colin J. O. Harrison. 1997. Academic Press, London. 347 pages, 64 color plates, black and white illustrations throughout text. Softback, acid-free paper. \$22.95. ISBN 0-12-072831-1.

This new edition of Colin Harrison's classic work, *Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds* (hereafter *Nests*), published originally in 1978 but out of print for several years, is a window onto the world of the nest. Paul Baicich has helped revise the guide, which covers all birds breeding north of the U.S.-Mexican border. As does the original, the second edition includes an introduction to breeding biology, an egg- and nestling-identification key, brief but detailed species accounts, color plates of nestlings painted by Philip Burton, and egg photos by F. Greenaway and Clark

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Sumida. Distributed throughout the text are black and white illustrations depicting nests and down patterns of chicks.

While the second edition retains most of the original baseline information, it offers revised and expanded details on breeding biology, brings the work more in line with present taxonomy, and adds species accounts for several rare or suspected breeders. Numerous black-and-white nest drawings by Terry O'Nele now accompany Andrew Burton's original nest illustrations, and a selected bibliography has been added. The format is enlarged and of higher archival quality—the text is now printed on semi-gloss, acid-free paper, which I hope will prevent the yellowing that has afflicted my copy of the first edition.

Species accounts, preceded by family summaries, give more detailed information on nest type and placement and material used in nest construction. Egg descriptions remain the same, but nestlings are described in greater detail. The authors have also filled in some blanks regarding lengths of incubation and nestling periods. The new edition also elaborates on the roles played by male and female in nest construction, incubation, and feeding in some species, but I would like to see notes in greater depth on adults' behavior at the nest.

Biologists will find useful additional information regarding the young birds' age at major mile markers such as eyes opening, wing feathers breaking sheath, and independence. *Nests* also highlights many obvious gaps in knowledge and should encourage those monitoring nests to make detailed notes describing nestlings' development by day.

The illustrations abstract the nest into its various components—egg, nest structure, nestling, and begging mouth. Forty-seven color plates of egg photos are an excellent aid to identification, though their scale varies, in the case of wood warblers, within the plate, making size comparison difficult. The egg plates are now collected in the center of the guide rather than distributed throughout the species accounts, which works for comparing eggs, but I would still prefer to study the text and egg photos side by side.

Despite many additions, I am dissatisfied with the overall quality of the nest illustrations. A good number of the small cup nests lack physical context, being portrayed on a snippet of branch dangling in a lot of white space. These graphics therefore do little for the field biologist working to build a search image. While O'Nele's nest figures possess a somewhat more dynamic quality than do Burton's, her highly stylized illustrations are not very accurate. For example, the Lazuli Bunting's nest is depicted as unlined, extremely exposed, and abnormally tattered around the rim, while the eggs in the cup are askew in a position I have never observed. A strange homogeneity pervades illustrations of shape and materials of many cup nests. Although I cannot recommend these illustrations for species-level identification, captions do illuminate some unique aspects of the nests represented.

Sixteen color plates of nestlings convey the diversity of appearances of birds fresh out of the egg, from the Turkey Vulture, with its black naked face peering out of a suit of woolly white down, to the scrawny and precariously perched Least Bittern, to the Brown-headed Cowbird chick lunging over the edge of a packed Red-eyed Vireo nest to grab the next morsel. These plates depict only a selection of nestlings, so for identification purposes one may find more useful the key to nestling mouth color and notes on gape color, skin color, and down patterns provided in the species accounts. I especially appreciate the comparative descriptions of down patterns in three families of cavity nesters—the titmice, creepers, and nuthatches. More line drawings of nestling development, though, such as that of the House Sparrow depicted in the introduction, would be welcome for native North American species.

This edition outlines various national nest-monitoring schemes and contacts for getting involved. Biologists and amateur naturalists seeking to apply their observation skills to the conservation of birds and their habitats may want to consider establishing nest-monitoring plots and participating in one of these nationally standardized data-

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collection programs. Systematic nest monitoring can reveal a great deal about birds' life histories, including clutch size, number of nesting attempts made, and number of young birds produced per pair. Monitoring not only enables us to learn where and when birds nest locally, but also to investigate factors influencing productivity. We can then make comparisons among years, habitats, populations, and even between species nesting in temperate and tropical zones.

This book is not about recreational nest searching, nor is it meant for hobbyist egg or nest collectors. It will be of most use to field biologists and the increasing cadre of birders involved in breeding-bird atlases, as well as birders who wish to broaden their horizons. Enough new information has been added to warrant purchase of the revised edition, even if you own the first, and I would encourage environmental educators to incorporate this guide into their programs.

A caution to those using this book in conservation planning: geographic variation is not well addressed in the species accounts. The nest-site descriptions are somewhat like composite portraits, and one must really stretch the imagination to envision an actual nest site that might be encountered locally. Compare the Wilson's Warbler species account to that in the Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas (W. D. Shuford, 1993, Bushtit Books, Bolinas, CA): while *Nests* gives a very general account, the Marin Atlas compares birds nesting in coastal California and the Sierra Nevada, highlighting contrasts in the breeding biology of the two populations.

The sticky subject of subspecies (a topic barely addressed in this guide) further confounds the issue. For example, the nest description for Swainson's Thrush does not apply closely to sites that colleagues and I have documented for *Catharus ustulatus oedicus* in Marin County, California. The description offered in *Nests* seems better to reflect Swainson's Thrushes breeding in coniferous woodland than in coastal riparian habitat.

Other life-history information presented in the species accounts begs clarification. For instance, some accounts state that a species is known to be single- or double-brooded. The attempt to raise a second brood after one has fledged affects the net reproductive rate of a population and is clearly relevant to the conservation of healthy bird populations. But the occurrence of double-brooding may vary by year, subspecies, or bioregion, and claims of double-brooding should be placed in context—where and under what circumstances has it been observed for a species? The new edition of *Nests* calls the Warbling Vireo double-brooded; however, it is difficult to locate a published scientific reference describing this, although it has been observed on rare occasions by my colleagues in Marin County. Thus it would be unwise to generalize that Warbling Vireos are double-brooded across North America every year. This leads me to my main criticism of the book—expanded biological detail really demands inclusion of citations, and their omission seriously depreciates the value of this volume as a scientific tool.

Baich offers in the bibliography to respond to written requests for citations, and one is advised to use this guide in combination with the species accounts in the *Birds of North America* series (currently being produced by the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and the American Ornithologists' Union), which present facts well framed with locations, sample size, and references. For a western U.S. perspective, one can also check Hal Harrison's *Western Birds' Nests* in the Peterson Field Guide series.

I believe that biologist and general reader alike will benefit from this revision of *Nests* and, despite some of its shortcomings, I am relieved to see this book back in print, so that the information contained within is again widely accessible.

Stacy Small