

BOOK REVIEWS

Birds by Andrews and Righter, (Denver Mus. Nat. Hist. Press, 1992.) The best testimonial, besides accolades from Coloradoans, is that the atlas has already found its way on to tables at agency and resource-planning meetings—one main reason it was undertaken.

Bruce Webb

Bird Songs of the Rocky Mountain States and Provinces, by Robert Righter and Geoffrey A. Keller. 1999. Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Set of 3 cassettes (ISBN 0-938027-45-X), or 3 compact disks (ISBN 0-938027-43-3). Price \$29.95.

This set of recordings covers an impressive variety of vocalizations from 259 bird species characteristic of the Rocky Mountain states and provinces—from the Horned Grebe to Hepatic Tanager, Mountain Plover to McCown's Longspur. The species are arranged in AOU (1998) sequence, and cuts were compiled from the work of 47 sound recordists. An accompanying booklet provides context for most calls and gives the location of each recording (at the state level only). In addition, and something I find useful, is that the booklet includes written transcriptions for each vocalization and often articulates helpful comparisons for distinguishing songs, sounds, and calls from similar species, e.g., the various woodpeckers' drumming.

The selection of species is somewhat eclectic, presumably reflecting the material available, but most if not all regional specialities are represented, such as the Sage Grouse (including the disjunct Gunnison population), both prairie-chickens, and all three rosy-finches. "Mundane" species are not ignored, which is nice, including the Northern Shoveler and Ruddy Duck—the latter sounds like it was displaying directly into the microphone! One can make useful comparisons between the Clark's and Western grebes, Trumpeter and Tundra swans, or Bohemian and Cedar waxwings. All four North American breeding swifts are included, as are songs and calls of all four longspurs. The recordings range from good to excellent and seem not to have been edited excessively for "purity" of sound. Thus the vocalizations sound "natural," with other species sometimes audible in the background, but always softly and not interfering with the main subject.

For most species more than one type of vocalization is included, usually distinguished in the booklet as song or call. In some cases the recordings were made outside the region, as in Alaska or New York, while the Golden Eagle was a captive bird from Scotland. The geographic provenance of vocalizations touches on an issue that I would like to see treated more critically by series of recordings, or even of photographs: exact location and date are much more informative than simply "Alaska" (e.g., song of Fox Sparrow) or "Venezuela" (call of Red-eyed Vireo). Such data make the recordings far more useful—birds may sing away from the breeding grounds, and different subspecies can sound quite different. For example, multiple subspecies of Fox Sparrow occur in Alaska, and the variation in this species' songs and calls is just beginning to be appreciated. In such cases, noting the exact location and/or relevant subspecies would be helpful.

Another comment that might be addressed by a reprinting is that, while the geographic area covered is presumably intuitive for the authors, a simple map would help those of us less familiar with western North American geography. This would also give potential buyers an idea of how useful the recordings might be for an area they plan to visit. These minor recommendations aside, the compilers are to be congratulated on a first-rate product, and anyone interested in the vocalizations of North American birds would do well to own a copy of these sound recordings.

Steve N. G. Howell