

BOOK REVIEW

Birds of Oregon: A General Reference, by David B. Marshall, Matthew G. Hunter, and Alan L. Contreras (eds.). 2003. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis. 768 pages, 104 black-and-white illustrations, numerous maps. Hardback, \$65.00. ISBN 0-87071-497-X. Errata at <http://home.comcast.net/~matt.hunter/bogrrerrata/errata.htm>.

This highly anticipated publication (hereafter BOGR) isn't your usual state bird book for a couple of reasons, the first of which can be detected in the subtitle—it is more than just "status and distribution." The second is indicated in the listing of three editors, for not only were there an additional four principal contributors but the actual species accounts were authored by about 100 volunteers, recruited from among the state's birders, biologists, and researchers. Given the total number of contributors, this book probably also stands out as being more eagerly awaited than any other state book.

There's a lot to peruse in these 5.2 pounds and 752 pages, a size befitting the tenth largest state, whose bird list ranks fifth largest in the country. Luckily for us, BOGR is extremely well organized and clearly written. A section "About This Book" after the preface and acknowledgments explains abbreviations, defines terms of abundance and frequency, and describes the layout of the following chapters and the species accounts. The first of these chapters is an interesting essay describing the changes in Oregon's avifauna since 1935, the cut-off date for Gabrielson and Jewett's (1940) seminal treatise on the subject. Chapter 2 describes the habitats found throughout the state, divided into eleven ecoregions (though in the discussion the Snake River Plain and the [unmapped] Central Basin and Range ecoregions are lumped into the Northern Basin and Range ecoregion). The 593 pages of Chapter 3 constitute the heart of any state bird book, the species accounts. These essentially follow AOU (1998) sequence and taxonomy, with perhaps the only exception being that the Black Brant is listed as a separate species. Chapter 4 offers a review of supplemental species not treated in the species accounts (those considered extirpated, not established, unverified, etc.). These chapters are followed by a brief glossary and three appendices. The first appendix is an extensive list of the common and scientific names of plants and animals mentioned in the species accounts, the second is a table of name changes since Gabrielson and Jewett, and the third describes the Oregon Breeding Bird Atlas (OBBA), the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), and the Christmas Bird Count. The approximately 3600 literature citations in the bibliography add significant scientific value to the work—and these are just the printed and electronic sources. Following the bibliography is a supplemental listing of over 100 names, with qualification and location, of people cited by the authors in personal communications. I expect this unconventional listing may prove useful to researchers. Many of these sources were also authors of the species accounts, and these citations refer you to the interesting author biographies that follow. Finally, the index, solely of birds, is divided into common and scientific names.

The stated objectives of the book (on page ix) are to "(1) document the status and distribution of the state's birds as known at the beginning of the 21st century; (2) set forth what is known of their habitat requirements in terms of food, cover, and space; and (3) stimulate research and continued investigations by showing what is not known." It bears mentioning that this is the third book published with the same leading title, and its success might be measured by comparing it with the others. *Birds of Oregon* by Gabrielson and Jewett (1940) was the first, and a landmark in its time. Then came *Birds of Oregon: Status and Distribution* by Gilligan et al. (1994). Delineating the status and distribution for most species is a relatively straightforward process, and BOGR does an excellent job, not only updating Gabrielson and Jewett but also going into much greater detail than did Gilligan et al. In fulfilling the second

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and third objectives, this book goes well beyond its predecessors. Two outstanding improvements are frequent citations and the inclusion of subspecies (see below).

After a short introductory essay, each species account continues with six subtitled sections. The *General Distribution* is usually taken from the AOU (1998), and the number of subspecies found in North America and Oregon is mentioned (following a variety of sources). This section could have benefited from a critical review by experts with greater expertise outside the state of Oregon. Lapses such as incorrect distribution of the Boreal Owl (this species does not occur in Arizona), for example, could have been avoided. *Oregon Distribution* follows, with most accounts being quite detailed. When more than one subspecies occurs the distribution of each is detailed when confirmed by specimens. The sections *Habitat and Diet* and *Seasonal Activity and Behavior* try to refer to what is known in Oregon; when information from Oregon is lacking the lack is pointed out and data from other regions are often given. *Detection* is a very short paragraph (often one sentence) giving tips on how and where to find the species. Concluding is *Population Status and Conservation*, a section frequently, but not always, backed up with BBS statistics, and which should prove useful to managers and conservationists. At the end is the name of the author(s). All accounts are heavily peppered with citations, including many personal communications.

Because the writing ability, time spent researching literature, and personal experience of each author varied, it is perhaps to be expected that the quality of the resulting accounts might also vary. However, since each author was given a strict format to follow, and perhaps because of extensive proofreading, I usually found it difficult to discern that multiple authors were involved. The length of accounts is usually quite consistent. Some are rather extensive, however, perhaps reflecting the interest and knowledge of an author, with the Peregrine Falcon being a noteworthy example. Other authors obviously delved deeper into the literature, as with the Downy Woodpecker. But it is odd that Cassin's Vireo warranted only about 1.5 columns of text, while Hutton's Vireo received twice that, and the Black Swift slightly over 3 columns. I would argue that Cassin's Vireo deserves attention at least equal to that given these two other species, considering that it is migratory and in Oregon manifests a more complex distribution, seasonal occurrence, and habitat preference. The *Population and Conservation* [sic] section contains almost no useful information, a habitat description here is misplaced, and a reference to Smith et al. 1977 should be 1997; furthermore, a statement claiming "no serious conservation problems," while perhaps true, is unsubstantiated.

The large number of citations throughout (averaging around 30 per species, by my tally of a few accounts) shows how much work went into each account. A list of required or recommended references was probably provided to authors, but, if so, they weren't always referred to evenly. For information on diet and nesting some authors referred heavily to the recent *Birds of North America* species accounts, while others chose A. C. Bent's life histories. This difference may have been due to accounts in the former series not having been published, but it would be nice to know when this was the case; a date next to the author's name, indicating when a BOGR account was written, would have been a helpful addition. Elsewhere, some authors referred extensively to published field notes in *Oregon Birds* or *North American Birds* (and its predecessors), others to personal communications, and some to neither. Some accounts could have been better researched. Why, for example, was H. Herlyn's 1999 "Birds of Benton County, Oregon" (until early 2003 at <http://osu.orst.edu/pubs/birds/county/bent/index.html>) not used in describing the status and seasonality of the Eurasian Wigeon or Hermit Warbler in the central Willamette Valley? In it I found earlier and later dates than in sources that were used. The *Oregon Breeding Bird Atlas*, not referred to at all in some accounts, was randomly referred to as

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“OBBA” or “Adamus et al. 2001”; this citation should have been standardized. In general, though, the species accounts are excellent and useful.

One of the highlights of this book, and one that extends to birders and ornithologists well beyond Oregon’s borders, is the exhaustive treatment of subspecies. The editors couldn’t have found a better consultant than M. Ralph Browning to act as taxonomic editor; there probably isn’t anyone alive with more experience of the literature and specimens from the state. Much new information apparently appears here for the first time, and the need for further field and specimen research is hinted at frequently. This aspect of the book provides a much needed update to Gabrielson and Jewett.

Vagrants are one of the aspects of birding that keeps many of us going, and the joy and challenge of finding rarities is a source of much of field ornithology’s energy. Unfortunately, BOGR gives vagrants uneven and not always informative treatment. The descriptions of range and habitat are frequently inaccurate: the Mountain Plover mostly does not breed “on the high plateaus of the Rocky Mtns.,” but it certainly does breed farther south than Colorado. The Clay-colored Sparrow is not really of “dry brushlands.” The Northern Wheatear winters in Africa, not Asia, etc. And though no one was more qualified to write these accounts than Harry Nehls, longtime Oregon Birds Records Committee (OBRC) secretary, the information in them could have been organized a little better. Species with about 12 or fewer records have them listed individually, which may be too much information; birds that are more regular in occurrence are given less precise data. It would have been good simply to list the number of accepted records for each species along with early and late dates. Some accounts, like that for the Tennessee Warbler, are excellent. But others, like that for the Eastern Phoebe, are bewildering—only two records were “submitted to the OBRC,” but the account continues to cite the OBRC for an additional three records and *Oregon Birds* for two more, all of which indeed have been reviewed and accepted by the OBRC (H. Nehls, “The Records of the Oregon Bird Records Committee,” http://www.oregonbirds.org/or_rarebird_recs.html). Also, whether records were credited to the OBRC or to notes published in other sources seems to have been random. Some editorial rules could have made this a more useful part of the book for what is surely one of its largest audiences.

The choice to include maps from the OBBA was interesting. Maps were included for all but about 70 breeding species, omissions being mainly or entirely those breeding on the outer coast (e.g., the Pelagic Cormorant and Common Murre), of only very limited breeding distribution (e.g., the Black Swift and Pine Grosbeak), or those occurring statewide (e.g., the Great Horned Owl and House Sparrow). In the section “About This Book” readers are duly warned about the interpretation of “possible” versus “probable” levels of breeding indicated on the maps, but these sorts of maps require more rigorous interpretation (and editing) to be of much use to the reader. Unfortunately, it appears that the maps weren’t used by many authors in describing breeding distributions. For example, the Ring-billed Gull account, which is otherwise extremely well written, makes no reference to reports of possible breeding in Lincoln and Yamhill counties. Looking at the OBBA reveals not only that these birds were probably nonbreeding wanderers but also that the species was confirmed as a breeding bird on the Columbia River in Clatsop County, not mentioned anywhere in the BOGR account. It turns out that when the maps were printed they were cropped at the state’s borders, and the OBBA hexagon containing this site lies almost entirely in Washington, thus this well-known breeding colony (M. Patterson, pers. comm.) is revealed in BOGR as only a few pixels. Additional examples showing a lack of connection between species accounts and maps are the Long-billed Curlew (breeding confirmed in Jefferson County; Willamette Valley records must have been of migrants or vagrants), Long-eared Owl (breeding confirmed in Benton County), Pileated Woodpecker (occurs in the mountains of Klamath and Lake counties), and

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Swainson's Thrush (Great Basin records). While the inclusion of some maps may confuse, the Song Sparrow is missing its map, perhaps the only species for which this omission is unfortunate—the detailed discussion of subspecies' ranges fails to describe this species' statewide distribution, and one is left thinking that maybe Song Sparrows don't occur at all in Deschutes or Jefferson counties. Some or all of this confusion could have been avoided by providing copies of the OBBA to authors dealing with breeding species, and maybe having them edit the maps (or even hand-draw accurate ones). In any case, anyone seriously interested in the distribution of Oregon's breeding birds needs to refer to the OBBA in conjunction with this book. There are also gaps in the maps, such as the recent Yamhill County breeding record of Black Phoebe, which can be misleading when one is tempted to look quickly at a map and not wade through the text. I'm left thinking that simply omitting the OBBA maps may have been a better use of space, but edited or newly drawn maps for every species would have been a valuable addition.

Sprinkled here and there throughout the text (averaging about every six pages) are line drawings of birds by Elva Hamerstrom Paulson. These aren't meant to be aids to identification, and, while a few are a little "off" in shape and proportion, they were drawn with a tender, homey quality that results in exactly the desired effect: they break up what would be an otherwise bleak landscape of columns and paragraphs and make leafing through the book a pleasure. The chapter on habitats also has some splendidly drawn scenes illustrating the various ecoregions.

The editing in general seems to have been very thorough, although it didn't take me long to find a few inconsequential typos. These and a few other similar glitches are obviously minor, and the enormous task of arranging the references was executed brilliantly, even when the potential for error was great (such as when different publications with the same name and date were cited in different accounts). The layout was well planned, with text placed in two columns, the accounts in a continuous run, and narrow but sufficient margins—wasting essentially no space. Each page has an informative header, making it impossible to get lost in the book. The binding and paper seem to be of excellent quality.

While I have issues with the treatment of rarities and the use of OBBA maps, these complaints wither under the overall impact of this book. The task of organizing the army of authors and making them productive must have been monumental, and to have massaged this all into a single, useful tome seems an almost impossible task. This is a tremendously valuable and important work, and a must-have for any regional birder, ornithologist, wildlife manager, and policy maker, or anyone simply interested in birds of the western United States.

I thank Paul Lehman for his comments on a draft of this review.

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