

BOOK REVIEWS

Biodiversity, Ecosystems, and Conservation in Northern Mexico was generally well edited, and I found very few typos, although in several chapters I sorely missed a useful abstract, summary, or conclusion. The index appears complete and useful. While I encourage you to seek out this book and examine its contents (every serious library should have a copy), probably only a limited number of readers of *Western Birds* will need to add it to their permanent collections.

Richard A. Erickson

Birds of Lane County, Oregon, edited by Alan L. Contreras. 2006. Oregon State University Press. 366 pages. 130 black-and-white photos, illustrations, and figures. Paperback, \$20.00. (ISBN 0-87071-180-6).

The size of Delaware, Rhode Island, and 26 Districts of Columbia combined, Lane County is Oregon's sixth largest county. Stretching from the crest of the Cascades across the farmlands and wetlands of the Willamette Valley and over the Coast Range to the Pacific, its topographical diversity gives it more bird species (403 recorded) than any other county in the state.

Birds of Lane County, Oregon, is both a birding guide and a comprehensive treatment of the status and distribution of the county's avifauna. The first half of the book surveys 100 birding locations with site guides authored by 12 contributors. The second half consists of species accounts authored by the book's editor, Alan Contreras.

This volume offers much of interest for Oregon birders and field ornithologists, as suggested by its brisk early sales. Readers from outside Oregon may find it useful for two reasons. First, because Lane County is a representative microcosm of the Pacific Northwest, the book is instructive for understanding this region's habitats and avifauna. Second, the book serves as an outstanding model for a county bird book—a genre of which I expect we will see more and more in the years ahead.

After introducing Lane County's physical geography, the book takes us on a tour through its 100 featured sites. This survey is organized by region across 12 chapters, with the Eugene–Springfield metro area receiving more detailed attention than do the less populated outlying regions. The site guides are straightforward, readable, informative, and follow a style similar to that of the ABA bird-finding series. Maps, well executed by Kit Larsen, superimpose roads and locations of interest over topographical backgrounds and provide an appropriate level of detail. For each site, icons relate the quality of birding by season, the availability of handicapped access, and (for coastal sites) the best tides at which to visit. For all these reasons, *Birds of Lane County* will prove valuable for the visiting birder.

Following the site guides come the 403 species accounts. Each account focuses on status and distribution within the county—a wise choice in prioritizing space, since the biology and broader status of Oregon's birds were so admirably covered in *Birds of Oregon: A General Reference* (reviewed in *Western Birds* 34:178–181, 2003). Contreras, an editor of that tome, has gone to impressive lengths to uncover occurrences of birds from old and obscure literature and from the field notes and dimming memories of the living. As a result, *Birds of Lane County* boasts considerable scientific merit in establishing an accurate and comprehensive historical record.

The species accounts also showcase Contreras's skill at communicating the essence of a bird's status and distribution accurately and insightfully within a concise format. The editor is an accomplished (and published) poet, and although he keeps his prose terse and pragmatic in this volume, his economy and efficacy with words are apparent.

The text is leavened with attractive and lifelike illustrations drawn by Barbara Gleason. It also features numerous photographs of rarities and other species of interest, although in my copy some photos are printed too dark and others do not show up well in black and white. For selected species, graphs portray data on seasonality,

BOOK REVIEWS

population trends, or abundance among Christmas Bird Count (CBC) circles.

In the book's final pages, Contreras presents a concise history of ornithological work conducted in the county, as well as profiles of the book's contributors, contact information for organizations and agencies, and a checklist, species index, glossary of place names, and reference list. Also included are average spring arrival dates from 1994 to 2004 for 50 species, compiled by Tom Mickel. Contreras follows this with checklists to encourage readers to keep their own records for spring and fall arrivals and departures. This appealing feature makes clear that the building of knowledge about a local avifauna is a community exercise, and it welcomes the newcomer to participate.

Although the diversity of items that *Birds of Lane County* offers is one of its strengths, it also frequently leaves the reader desiring more depth. The concise, factual style of both the site guides and the species accounts leaves little room for interpretive discussion. As a result, the reader interested in reasons behind the patterns sometimes ends up with more questions than answers.

For instance, conservation and management efforts that have influenced the status and distribution of birds in the county could have been given more attention. In particular, restoration and management initiatives at Fern Ridge Reservoir have helped drive population trends of certain species within the county (e.g., shorebirds, breeding ducks), and readers may want to understand the roles that habitat improvements have played at this important location.

This volume also could have benefited from a wider and more systematic use of data-rich graphics. Bar charts of seasonal abundance are such a wonderful tool, distilling a great deal of information intuitively into a concise space, so it is unfortunate that these were not used. No figures synthesize data from Breeding Bird Survey routes or from the *Oregon Breeding Bird Atlas* (reviewed in *Western Birds* 33:125–127, 2002). Moreover, the graphical depictions included are not always explicitly integrated with the text. For example, a graph of White-breasted Nuthatch numbers from the Eugene CBC since 1942 shows an increase and then a decline. The text correctly tells us that this species relies on stands of mature oaks but does not link this to the population trends shown. Another graph shows the unexplained variation in CBC numbers of the Red-breasted Sapsucker but leaves one to wonder why other species with considerable year-to-year variation (such as the Pine Siskin) are not similarly graphed.

Overall, an enhanced use of graphical summaries might have made this volume more engaging and scientifically valuable, but this is a secondary concern. As a guide for residents and visitors, as a historical record of the birds of the county, and as a model for a county bird book, *Birds of Lane County* succeeds admirably.

Jay Withgott