BOOK REVIEWS

Kaufman Field Guide to Advanced Birding: Understanding What You See and Hear, by Kenn Kaufman. 2011. Houghton Mifflin, New York. 448 pages, over 700 photographs, 43 line drawings. Softback, $21.00. ISBN 978-0-547-24832-5.

With an abundance of identification guides available on bookstore shelves, as well as web sites dedicated to the finer points of field identification, there is no shortage of information available to today's birders wanting to challenge themselves with difficult groups of birds. While plenty of references are available for beginners learning how to use field marks and for experts studying molt schedules and specific feather tracts, there is little information to help intermediate birders to learn *how to look at* birds. *Advanced Birding* aims to fill that gap; rather than providing a reference *for* advanced birders, this book is about *becoming* an advanced birder.

This purpose may confuse people who use the earlier version. Along with other birders, I expected the new *Advanced Birding* to be an update to Kaufman's *Advanced Birding* (1990, Houghton Mifflin, Boston). I soon found the title to be somewhat misleading, and the back-cover blurb provides our first hint, describing this book as "all new." That's not entirely true, as Kaufman incorporates many aspects of the 1990 version here. Still, readers should not expect this book to replace the original, a classic aimed at advanced birders. Kaufman notes in the introduction, "Simply updating that book now without changing its focus would hardly serve a useful purpose, because virtually all birders have access to vastly more information today than they did in 1990 (p. 6)." Readers expecting an updated version of the 1990 guide will be disappointed to find a book containing more basic information and little of the knowledge that the ornithological world has gained in the past 20 years. Those who are likely to gain the most from *Advanced Birding* are birders who feel overwhelmed by the vast amount of information available and want to learn about advanced *concepts* of bird identification rather than getting bogged down in details. Kaufman uses his own extensive knowledge of bird identification to ease readers through this conceptual approach to birding and clear out the clutter of unnecessary information.

A quick comparison of the table of contents of the two versions reveals the different goals of the two books. The 1990 volume begins with a 19-page introductory chapter, followed by 34 chapters focusing on some of the toughest identification challenges in North America. The new book expands the introduction into seven chapters covering 135 pages. The family and genus accounts include 24 chapters, covering some groups of very difficult species and some more basic identification issues.

The first seven chapters of *Advanced Birding* expand upon the information available in the 1990 guide. They cover broad topics such as different approaches to identification, conservation and the responsibilities of birders, what you should (and should not) focus on in the field, molt, behavior, variation within a species, and general birding tips. Nearly all the information available here is very useful, though experienced birders are already familiar with most of it. The chapter on bird topography struck me as being unnecessarily long and detailed for a guide to advanced birding. While I was impressed with the detailed line drawings of feather groups shown below the photographs on which they are based (pp. 66–73), most of the general information and figures of feathers and feather tracts can be found in most field guides and numerous other publications. On the other hand, Chapter 6, "Identification beyond the Species Level," provides excellent information, including techniques for aging and sexing, subspecies and color morphs, hybrids, and plumage abnormalities. This chapter will prove useful even for many experts, since nearly everyone is guilty of now and then overlooking intraspecific variation.

My main quibble with the introductory chapters involves the section "Geographic Variation and the Subspecies Problem (p. 117)." While I understand and mostly

agree with Kaufman's statements in this section, I disagree with the presentation of subspecies as a "problem" rather than a rewarding challenge for birders. Kaufman urges caution when attempting to identify birds to subspecies, a point that is sensible and well explained. However, he makes little mention of distinctive subspecies and no mention of the possibility of future splits. After all, it is the birders who pay attention to subspecies who are prepared to identify "new" species such as the Cackling Goose and Pacific Wren. Kaufman warns against attempting to identify Oregon Juncos to subspecies but glosses over more distinctive subspecies such as the White-winged and Gray-headed. I believe that such detailed study can reveal many patterns and identification challenges more interesting than if all juncos are called simply "Dark-eyed." In contrast to this section, Kaufman does discuss gull subspecies in depth in the chapter "Learning to Identify Gulls," including the challenges they present, and the possibility of discovering vagrants.

The majority of the book consists of 24 chapters covering specific groups of birds. Fourteen of these concern "Learning to Identify" a tough family, in which Kaufman discusses important features, significant factors such as migration and molt, and sometimes outlines the groups or genera within the family. The latter approach is very practical, applied to ducks, shorebirds, terns, warblers, and sparrows. The remaining chapters detail identification of certain genera or species pairs that present true identification challenges, nearly all of which follow a chapter summarizing the family. This is an effective approach; it is helpful to learn the basics of identification of terns, for example, before studying the genus *Sterna* in particular. The information in these chapters varies with the specific identification challenges of the group. For example, while the chapter on *Sterna* includes detailed figures of wing pattern and tail shape, the chapter on *Spizella* sparrows includes a suite of photographs illustrating differences in face pattern. The chapter on *Empidonax* flycatchers spans 41 pages, providing a wealth of photographs and detailed information about each species. The wood-warbler chapter includes a fascinating section on warblers' song types, complete with sonograms (p. 406). Nearly every chapter discusses the group's molt in detail, reflecting the increased emphasis on the role of molt in identification in the past 20 years. In each case, Kaufman emphasizes the specific aspects of plumage, structure, behavior, or voice that are most important to identification.

The family accounts vary widely, with the stated intention of covering a variety of topics in order to give readers a broad knowledge base to apply to identification problems in general, not just those included in the book. The chapter on gulls is excellent, expanding on the information in the 1990 guide to include more information about hybrids and subspecies, a detailed section on molt, and a summary of knowledge gained since 1990. Kaufman dedicates four pages to photographs illustrating the plumage sequence of the Ring-billed Gull from fresh juvenile to fourth-cycle adult. Such a well-written and focused summary of gull identification could give squeamish birders the confidence to look at immature gulls.

In contrast to this well-constructed and informative chapter, the two pages on woodpeckers seem entirely unnecessary. Most of the chapter is focused on variation in red markings in various species, discussing genera that pose very little difficulty in identification. The chapter may even confuse beginners who never thought that woodpeckers were much of a challenge. A chapter dedicated to sapsucker identification would have been a better use of the space. Chapters on seabirds, owls, and swallows are similarly ineffectual. Although plenty of birders have difficulty with these groups, particularly seabirds, the chapters are too brief to be of much use in improving identification skills.

Overall, this book is well-constructed and well-written, with a wealth of information presented in a manner quite accessible to readers. The abundance of photos is an addition to this version, used in creative ways to illustrate Kaufman's points throughout the book. These photos are an immense improvement over many of the line drawings

in the 1990 version. One of many examples is a series of photographs of Least Sandpipers in alternate and juvenile plumages (p. 230), illustrating the species' variation in coloration and shape. Editorially, I found very few problems with the book. Only a handful of typographical errors caught my eye. For example, "I don't recommend trying to guess the ages of lone accipiters in the field (p. 200)" should refer to sex, not age. Additionally, a few sections of the book are somewhat redundant. For example, the sections "Look at Flying Birds (p. 30)" and "Flight Behavior (p. 99)" share most of the same ideas. Some of the introduction to the flycatchers (p. 346) is recycled from the first few chapters and not at all specific to flycatcher identification (e.g., advice to study birds of known identity and to consider molt and wear).

These quibbles aside, my main problem with the book is the title. I found it misleading that the same title was used for two books with such differences in audience and overall approach, despite some overlap in information. To those already advanced birders who are comfortable referring to their older version of *Advanced Birding*, I recommend sticking to the original. Since 1990, mountains of new books on identification have been published, not to mention the advent of the Internet. Perhaps a new guide compiling this knowledge into a book on advanced identification issues is in order, but this is not that guide. On the other hand, for anyone who feels fed up trying to match gulls to pictures in field guides, who doesn't know where to start with an unfamiliar shorebird, who is beyond learning the basics of birding but still wants to improve his ability to critically examine birds in the field and to understand what he sees, this book will prove an invaluable tool.

Lauren Harter

On Her Own Terms: Annie Montague Alexander and the Rise of Science in the American West, by Barbara Stein. 2001. University of California Press. 380 pages, photographs. Cloth, $55.00. ISBN 0-520-22726-3.

This year is the tenth anniversary of the publication of Barbara Stein's biography of Annie Alexander, whose work to establish and support the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ) at the University of California, Berkeley, is not well known except to those with an interest in the history of the entity. Even regular users and supporters of the MVZ may not have any real sense of its origins: after all, our museums have always been there and always will be, right?

That this misconception about our leading museums, now facing exceptional funding and support crises, is so widespread is reason enough to revisit this book ten years after its issue. The fact that it was never reviewed in *Western Birds* at the time of its release is another reason. It's justification enough to call attention to an underappreciated, little-known book that both tells a central story of western science yet speaks to our passion for nature on a personal level.

Any biographer has to decide how much to emphasize the person's private and family life versus the actions that affected the wider society and so more important to history. In *On Her Own Terms*, Stein struck a fine balance between these two facets so intimately related. Like Florence Merriam Bailey (1863–1948) and unlike Margaret Morse Nice (1883–1974), to name two ornithologist contemporaries whose work and life overlapped significantly with those of Annie Alexander (1867–1950), Alexander had a life partner for forty of those years, Louise Kellogg, who was also her field and collecting partner.

Florence Merriam's husband, Vernon Bailey, was a mammal collector for the U.S. Biological Survey and they, like Alexander and Kellogg and also childless, spent long periods in the field together, returning from time to time to a more "civilized" exis-

tence. Nice, on the other hand, was among other things a mother to three daughters and a wife to a doctor husband. Her life could hardly have been more rooted, which led to her trailblazing and monumental but local study of the Song Sparrow. For an interesting comparison of lifestyles and biographical approaches, see Harriet Kofalk's *No Woman Tenderfoot: Florence Merriam Bailey, Pioneer Naturalist* (1989, Texas A&M University Press) and Nice's posthumous autobiographical *Research Is a Passion with Me* (1979, Consolidated Amethyst Publications, Toronto).

Alexander's background was that of exceptional wealth, as she was heiress to a Hawaiian sugar fortune. But becoming a shrewd businesswoman, Alexander grew her fortune independently. Family connections to Hawaii play a role in the book, particularly at the beginning and end. The meat of the story, however, is what the rich girl from Hawaii decided to do with her life after her father's untimely death.

People with lots of money can be divided into two rough categories: those who consider life to be an opportunity for play, indolence, and sloth and whose lives are of no particular value to man or beast, and those, the smaller group, who attempt to do something useful with their time on earth. Among the things Alexander did with her good fortune was to establish the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and to install Joseph Grinnell as its director. This was unusual only in that she was a woman; establishing museums of various kinds was, after all, one of the things that rich people did. What *was* unusual was what she did with her time. Well before she founded the museum, she had been funding scientific exploration of the West, and a course in geology stimulated her to become a scientific collector. The book tracks Alexander's odyssey through paleontology, ornithology, mammalogy and botany well, even though the written record of some of those early years was very thin.

The subtitle "Rise of Science in the American West" refers to several things. First, Alexander's establishing major institutes of biology and paleontology and her lifelong attention to their development, to make sure that they could do what she thought they should. Second, it addresses larger issues of how the museums could reach these goals as part of the University of California. What direction would western field biology take? Third, it is about the nature of field work in the west in the late 19th and early 20thcentury.

There are other books that touch on this last subject. One of the best is Loye Miller's *Lifelong Boyhood*, out of print but available as a modestly rare book from antiquarian book dealers. Kofalk's biography of Bailey is another, and some of the results of the new field science can be found in the expensive and hard to find *Joseph Grinnell's Philosophy of Nature*, a collection of some of his works published by the University of California in 1943 as a sort of festschrift.

What was different about Annie Alexander? First, she was a woman working as a field biologist in the late 19th and very early 20th Century, when both social norms and lack of formal opportunities generally precluded women from such work. Second, she was an exceptionally tough, stubborn woman whose field adventures, as Stein recounts in detail yet very readably, sometimes boggle the modern mind. In 1936, when Alexander was 69, she and Kellogg made a winter trip into the remote Saline Valley of Inyo County and were snowed in, with temperatures reaching –10 °F. They were eventually rescued after surviving mainly on cornmeal, beans, and a few cans of food obtained from a group of miners who were likewise stuck. But in following years they were right back at it. As Charles Sibley and his field team heard from a ranger in 1940, when Alexander was 73, "an elderly pair of ladies driving an old Franklin had driven out into the badlands several weeks earlier, and when he had gone to check on them…he found that they were doing just fine. They had knocked a hole in their drip pan but had placed a bucket under it to catch the oil and all was well."

Annie Alexander met Louise Kellogg when she advertised for a woman to accompany her on a field expedition—it was unseemly for a woman to travel alone with a company of men. After this, Annie and Louise were seldom apart for the rest

of Annie's long life. *On Her Own Terms* is a lesbian love story, though focused on the couple's work in the field, not their intimate lives, as much as it is a story of wild adventures in the field and of the high finance of a leading university. In her lifetime, Alexander kept a profile, both personally and professionally, as low as possible while pursuing her goals. As a result, her accomplishments are all the more impressive. Though she could not have imagined such a thing in her lifetime, in the 21st century Annie Alexander serves as a role model—especially valuable as gay and female role models in field biology are so rare.

On Her Own Terms is also about Alexander's complex, sometimes self-contradictory, but ultimately very productive relationship with Joseph Grinnell. But it is the sheer volume of Alexander's field work across much of the West that will provide a modern reader with a sense of what has changed in field biology and, to a certain extent, what has been lost in the way of organized biological sampling. The need for maintaining and enhancing modern museum collections has been discussed elsewhere (see, for example, Van Remsen's splendid article, The importance of continued collecting of bird specimens to ornithology and bird conservation, *Bird Conservation International* 5:145-180, 1995). That is a subject much larger than can be contained in a book review, yet reading Stein's account of what a small number of determined, largely self-trained field workers could accomplish despite living in a culture that discouraged such activity by any women, let alone those past sixty, is both enjoyable history and encouragement to all field ornithologists who work under adverse conditions.

Alan Contreras

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