

The new volume invites comparison on three levels. On the first, with its predecessor, this volume is vastly superior in virtually every respect. The more telling comparisons must be with the current Eastern Guide and with the book that has become many expert birder's guide of choice, the National Geographic *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (NGG).

The reception of the earlier revised Eastern Guide was mixed: praise for the improvements, regret at the disappearance of some cherished features, and criticism because it did not incorporate some of the more esoteric advances in identification and plumage variations covered in the NGG. While some of this was legitimate, it also missed the point. The book's target is the beginner, not the aficionado; and anyone who has tried to help a beginner sort out the eccentricities of the admittedly fine NGG turns to Peterson with a sigh of relief.

Peterson's genius — I don't think the word is an overstatement — lies in making the bird on the page really look like the living bird. For the neophyte, having trouble separating thrashers from thrushes and thrushes from waterthrushes, that is the key to a successful guide. And that essential ingredient is all too often missing in the NGG.

But it's true, of course, that Peterson did sacrifice something in the process of simplification; and I, for one, wish there were fewer places where it was necessary to explain to the student that, well, "not all of them look like that". So the question in everyone's mind was how he would approach these problems in the new Western Guide. Now we have the answer: he has succeeded very well indeed. Compare the 1 3/4-inch Sanderlings in the Eastern Guide (no immature plumage at all) to the 2 1/2-inch ones in the new book — complete with immature! Look at the innovations such as the full page illustrating the plumage transitions of a 4-year gull (the Western).

In format the book follows the pattern of its eastern predecessor. The range maps are again at the

back; a much-criticised element, but for me an eminently sensible trade-off to keep the key identification material as compact as possible, and avoid the minuscule maps of competing guides. These you can really see! They again appear to be accurate and surprisingly up-to-date. The rest of the book is also a delight, with large, clear images, sometimes — Rock Wren is a good example — showing different postures; and concise, informative text. Where relevant additional plumages are pictured showing local races, and there several pages of Mexican and Asian strays, replacing the Hawaiian species covered in the 1961 edition.

There are some flaws; for example, the paler lower mandible of the Great Crested Flycatcher is mentioned in the text (as "golden"), but missing on the plate (ironically, in the NGG the reverse is true!); and no undertaking of this magnitude could hope to satisfy every need. I wish a breeding plumaged Greater Yellowlegs was illustrated, and first spring Black-crowned Night-Herons are another source of confusion. The aficionados will still turn to the NGG for its extensive illustrations of plumage variations and for coverage of some finer points Peterson omits.

But quibbles are for book reviewers: this book is a tour de force, my reaction on finishing my first run-through was one of astonishment — How does Dr. Peterson continue to do it? Most of the other guides on the market are cooperative efforts! This book should be a delight to use in the field and, I suspect, become the guide of first reference for beginner and veteran alike. For easterners it's a good investment for its excellent shorebird and hawk plates alone. Get it.

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### **Mammals of the Neotropics, Volume 1: The Northern Neotropics: Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana**

By John F. Eisenberg. 1989. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. x + 449 pp., illus. Cloth U.S. \$85; paper U.S. \$34.95.

The main thrust of this book is the synthesis of descriptions and distributions of the different mammals found in the arbitrarily defined northern Neotropics. Although there is a very fine reference for the mammals of North America south to Panama and including the Caribbean islands (Hall 1981), comparable information on South America is scattered, dated, and not as comprehensive. With

increasing worldwide awareness of the effects of the continuing loss of tropical rainforest, there is a need to bring together our biological knowledge of all living organisms including mammals. Such information will benefit scientists, public officials, conservationists, and other interest groups in better understanding the complexities of the tropical ecosystem. This first of three volumes is taking us in the right direction though has fallen a bit short of my expectations, which probably were admittedly unrealistic considering the task at hand.



The bulk of the book deals with species accounts of mammals in the defined countries. These accounts are sandwiched between an introductory chapter on historical biogeography and contemporary habitats, and the final two chapters on speciation and faunal affinities, and community ecology. There are also 14 colour and seven black-and-white plates by Fiona Reid.

The approximately 400 species accounts are presented taxonomically and organized into 13 chapters representing the different mammalian orders found in the region. Generally, within each order, families are discussed and in turn are then divided into genera. Each of these successively more inclusive levels of classification are explained in terms of diagnosis, distribution, and natural history. The accounts themselves include description, distribution, range and habitat, and natural history for each species. This information is augmented by tables of measurements, line drawings, and systematic comments when deemed necessary. All species appear to have corresponding distribution maps. By and large, there are identification keys to the families and genera based on visible external features; however, there is no key to the orders and not all species groups have a key. Each chapter also has a separate bibliography that is quite extensive and relatively current. The plates include examples of all but three of the more poorly represented orders. They are of high quality with much detail, particularly, diagnostic features which facilitate identification.

According to the author, the book was intended as "an encyclopedia book for specialists as well as a practical volume for graduate students". The specialist may become frustrated, not because of incomplete

knowledge but because of a lack of indepth detail. Eisenberg's strength is behaviour and ecology. This information and his citations are good, however, the systematic aspect is not on a par (i.e., the systematics of *Carollia* in South America is not as straightforward as one is led to believe). Naturalists may find their interests more satisfied with a relatively good field key, useful plates, and practical information.

As usual with a publication of this magnitude errors have crept in (i.e., the key to the species of *Micronycteris* does not correspond to the species accounts in the text). As a reference source, the reader is left with a feeling of incompleteness. Distribution maps rely heavily on shading as opposed to dots which would represent actual specimens examined, and there are several species with large question marks where their range is an uncertainty. This, however, does inform mammalogists of the areas that require future attention (i.e., mammals of Guyana and French Guiana are the least investigated in the study area). Identification keys based on other characters, such as cranial, should have been incorporated when there was no practical field key available. Even these deficiencies do not outweigh the usefulness and wealth of information compiled in this book.

#### Literature Cited

- Hall, E. R. 1981. The mammals of North America. Second edition. John Wiley and Sons, New York. Two volumes.

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### Alaska Whales and Whaling

By Alaska Geographic. First published 1978, fourth reprint 1989. Alaska Northwest Publishing (GTE Discovery, Bothell, Washington). \$25.35 Canadian.

*Alaska Whales* is a special reprint of a more-than-10 year-old edition of the magazine, *Alaska Geographic*. As such, it is a series of articles rather than a coordinated book. About 40% is taken up by a field guide-like section on the fourteen species of great whale that frequent Alaskan waters. There are three short chapters on whale watching and whale biology. The remaining chapters are on whaling and its history. Each article is illustrated with plenty of fine photographs, both old and new, plus a number of black-and-white drawings.

Despite its age the articles make interesting reading. Do not expect anything controversial or emotional, nor any update on today's issues (results of the Exxon Valdez spill, for example). Although it deals with subsistence whaling in two chapters; one on

early native techniques and one on modern methods; there is little in-depth discussion. There are potent arguments both for and against native subsistence (or "cultural") whaling and an exploration of these would have been most informative and inspiring.

The historical sections are told in a competent but rather dry style. Many other books I have read have given a much better sense of the excitement, the cold and hardships, the smell, and the enormous sense of destruction. The text, along with the photographs, is intriguing to read though, especially for the comparison one can make to whaling in other areas.

The section on the species of whales is the best part of the reprint. Organized in a field guide-like format, it gives a good summary of each species biology plus some anecdotes of whale behaviour. There is a range map covering the seas around the north-west coast of North America from Yukon to





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