

EX LIBRIS

by Sheldon Dingle
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Almost every civilized person is delighted to receive a gift book. Indeed, people who enjoy nature in general and birds in particular are almost greedy for books. And more power to them. Gifts of books are gladly received and may be given at any time of the year but the upcoming holiday season may be the perfect time. With books, too, you can have as much fun giving as those have who receive. And let's face it. Who among us has not bought a book as a gift for someone, then relented and kept the thing?

The gamut of books is almost limitless, running from the most complex scientific treatise to the simplest child's book. Most of us prefer good books somewhere between these two extremes. The following books from my own library are not volumes that will elevate your library (or mine) to world class but they are good, informative, enjoyable books that don't cost much and will make excellent gifts for your bird loving friends.

The World Atlas of Birds, consulting editor, Sir Peter Scott; advisory editor for America, Olin Sewall Pettingill, Jr. Published in the United States by Random House, Inc., New York, 1974. Price \$30 (in 1974).

You may have to order this book from the publisher so, if it seems interesting, don't delay. Over the years, I've found this book to be a very excellent research source that answered hundreds of questions for me on such things as correct scientific names, range, general characteristics of a species, habitat, food sources, number of species in a given family, etc. Do you know that in the *Formicariidae* or Antbird family there are 221 species? Where would you go if you really needed to know? *The World Atlas of Birds*, of course.

The introductory chapter covers evolution, flight, migration, and physiology. The final chapter is an excellent exposition on classification explaining the relationships and characteristics of the 155 bird families of the world. The bulk of the volume is devoted to chapters that focus on the major geographical areas of the world and the various climate zones from arctic to tropical. Each section deals with the birds that are native to the habitat in question. This gives one a very good understanding of what

birds live where.

Each page of this 272-page volume (barring the classification charts) has several full color illustrations on it and gives one a very good idea what the birds look like and what their environment looks like. This is a very useful and interesting book that you'll spend hours with just for fun.

A Guide to Asiatic Parrots in Australia by Sid and Jack Smith, **A Guide to Australian Long- and Broad-tailed Parrots and New Zealand Kakarikis** by Kevin Wilson, **A Guide to Neophema and Psephotus Grass Parrots** by Toby Martin. These three 80-page soft-cover books are published by Australian Birdkeeper and are available from Silvio Mattacchione & Co., 1793 Rosebanks Rd. N., Pickering, Ontario, L1V 1P5, Canada. They are brand new (1990) and cost \$22.50 each title plus shipping.

These excellent guides focus on the avicultural aspects of the specific birds rather than their natural history. In this regard, they are excellent tools for the new or even more experienced aviculturist who keeps or wants to keep these species.

Each book contains about 27 full color plates — very good full-color photos, I might add. The format is about the same for all three titles. The introduction deals in detail with the management of the subject birds. Management, of course, covers housing, nesting, feeding, breeding, hand rearing, diseases and ailments, etc. The authors relate their first hand experiences and their expertise is evident. The management sections are veritable gold mines of avicultural knowledge and experience.

Next, the books treat the individual species. A page or two or three is devoted to each species with particular attention to the many beautiful color mutations that have developed in certain species. The photos are spectacular.

Because the subject birds here are among my very favorites, I may be a little biased but I'm very pleased with these books (I have all three) and am pleased to recommend them to you.

Audubon's Birds of America by George Dock, Jr. Published by Arrowswood Press, New York, New York, 1987. I don't know the retail price but it's probably around \$30. I found my copy on the bargain book table at a major retail chain and paid \$5.95. The dust jacket has a slight tear. Check your local stores. Such deals are not uncommon.

This 170-page book focuses on one of the greatest artistic and ornithological endeavors ever accomplished — *The Birds of America*, a massive book containing 435 life-size, full color paintings of Audubon's adopted land, America.

Dock's opening chapter is a very good short biography of John James Audubon, an extraordinary man you should all be acquainted with. In addition to leading a very exciting, often dangerous life, Audubon's conservationist ideas were decades ahead of their time. Add to this Audubon's revolutionary artistic style and you have quite a rare fellow indeed.

After the biography, Dock features 30 full color plates he calls "30 great Audubon birds." These are the most important or popular of all the paintings. They include the Passenger Pigeon (of which Audubon once saw a flock he estimated at over a billion birds) and the Carolina Parakeet. Each plate has an accompanying page that gives a very good packet of information on the subject bird.

This book is a pleasure to read. It contains adventure, human interest, conservation and art history. The color plates are frosting on the cake. What a gift! ●

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