

SOME ADAPTATIONS OF MARSH-NESTING BLACKBIRDS

GORDON H. ORIANS. 1980.
Monographs in Population Biology No.
14, Princeton University Press,
Princeton, New Jersey. Pp xii + 295,
illus., 16 appendices. Cloth \$18.00
U.S., paper \$7.95 U.S.

If you are interested in marsh passerines, blackbirds, or ecological theory you should read this book. The author studied marsh blackbirds in North America and Argentina to test ecological theories on habitat selection, foraging behaviour, and mate selection.

The author says his studies have led him to view marshes as "factories producing food and providing nest sites for blackbirds." He begins the book by discussing marshes as providers of resources. This introduction is valuable in understanding the problems faced by Red-winged, Yellow-headed, and Brewer's Blackbirds and their responses to these problems.

While reading the book I learned the explanation for some of my own casual observations. When I was in high school I was puzzled by the restriction of Yellow-headed Blackbirds near our farm to one slough while the Red-winged Blackbirds nested at every slough. The Yellowheads only expanded their distribution for two years at the peak of a wet cycle. Now I know why. Yellow-headed Blackbirds choose only habitats with large emergences of

aquatic insects, especially dragonflies and damselflies. These insects have large emergences on permanent marshes and were less abundant in the temporary sloughs at the farm.

While this book contains large quantities of information on blackbirds I found the discussions of optimal foraging and other theory most interesting. Orians uses his study to provide tests of theory when possible. He also uses theory to gain insights into blackbird behaviour and to pose new questions for study. I found this use of theory stimulating, giving me new insights into the activities of birds I watch.

The discussion of theory will be helpful to students of foraging, habitat selection, and mate selection even though many of the tests failed to conclusively prove or disprove the hypothesis.

The text is clear. The author uses many tables and graphs but some of these are difficult to understand.

I must add a word of warning. This book reports a scientific study and is not an easy reading natural history book. While the theory is well explained a few moments of thought are often necessary to understand the concepts. I therefore recommend *Some Adaptations of Marsh-Nesting Blackbirds* to those of you with special interests in blackbirds or ecological theory or who wish to read some ecological theory to gain new insights into bird behaviour. —
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THE HISTORY OF THE FEDERATION OF ALBERTA NATURALISTS AND ITS CORPORATE MEMBER CLUBS

Special Issue No. 1, Alberta Naturalist, July 1981. Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Box 1472, Edmonton, Alberta. T5J 2N5. 152 pp. Price \$6.00 plus \$1.00 postage.

Thirty-two authors have contributed to this interesting publication, one of two edited by the prolific and indefatigable Martin K. McNicholl, and produced in time for the August 1981 meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union in Edmonton. This special bulletin is dedicated to the late Helen Schuler, the first treasurer of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN), and the daughter of the late Steve A. Mann of Skull Creek, Saskatchewan, who himself was a past-president of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society.

David A. E. Spalding was contributed a tantalizingly brief overview of the history of Alberta naturalists (15 pages) and John M. Powell has written 15 pages on the history of the FAN itself. There are 42 pages about constituent societies, 45 pages about the officers, editors and patrons of the FAN, and 15 pages of appendices. Perhaps most valuable are the "critical reflections" of M. Tim Myres telling of the achievements, failures and problems of the FAN, since sister organizations share the same dependence on a few dedicated individuals and since some of the shortcomings are similarly shared. Myres makes thought-provoking comments about the dangers of "commercial secrecy" of some contract studies, and is "always saddened when graduate students haven't the time to belong to the local naturalists' organization".

It might seem presumptuous to publish a history of an organization only ten years old, but actually Spalding's account begins two centuries ago. Some of the material would have been difficult to obtain in another 20 years. In spite of some inevitable overlap and repetition between accounts of individuals and societies, telling of identical events from slightly different viewpoints, it is all interesting to read and worthwhile to have on record. The cover is graced by a charming Edgar T. Jones sketch of Alberta's provincial bird emblem, the Great Horned Owl. — Reviewed by C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8

BIRD BANDING IN ALBERTA

Special Issue No. 2, Alberta Naturalist. August 1981. Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Box 1472, Edmonton, Alberta. T5J 2N5. 73 pp. Price \$3.00 plus \$.50 postage.

This bulletin is dedicated to the memory of the late Ken Trann, an avid bird bander, teacher and conservationist, who died of leukemia at age 36. A sketch of a nestling Great Horned Owl by Edgar T. Jones graces the cover.

This does not pretend to be a definitive or comprehensive account of bird banding in Alberta. There is an overview of banding by the editor, Martin K. McNicholl, who devotes only one paragraph to waterfowl although more waterfowl have been banded than all other species of birds combined. The work of Ken Trann and that of Edgar T. Jones is featured. There are reprints of three interesting articles from 1928,

1939 and 1940, respectively: William Rowan's "Scientific Aspects of Bird Banding" from the *Bulletin of the Northeastern Bird Banding Association*, W. Ray Salt's "Notes on Recoveries of Banded Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawks" from *Bird Banding*, and "Bird Banding is Hobby of Alberta Housewife" (Kathleen Salt) from the *Family Herald and Weekly Star*. Included also are more recent studies on Merlin banding at Edmonton by Alan R. Smith, Tree Swallow and Mountain Bluebird banding by Donald J. Stiles, Ring-billed Gull movements by Chip Weseloh, sex ratio in American Dippers by David M. Ealey, the number of Black-capped Chickadees at a field station by Martin McNicholl, Peregrine Falcon

reintroductions by Allen N. Wiseley, and an impressive account of the number of raptors banded in the western provinces, North-west Territories and the Yukon, by Richard Fyfe and Ursula Banasch. Unfortunately the latter gives no breakdown as to numbers banded in Alberta versus other areas. Only for the Ferruginous Hawk is there a map of out-of-province recoveries and this has not been up-dated since Salt's 1939 publication. The thorough bibliographies are useful. In summary this is an interesting though random selection of what banders have accomplished in Alberta. — Reviewed by C. Stuart Houston, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. S7N 0J8



Muskrat.

Gary W. Seib