

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

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Birds of Chile by Alvaro Jaramillo. [2003]. 424 pages. (paperback), 96 colour plates. Princeton University Press. \$42.00 US (available on line). *Reviewed by Michael Force.*

At last, I'll finally be able to sort out those confounding cinclodes and frustrating furnariids next time I go to Chile. Chile is blessed (to some, cursed) with an abundance of drab grayish and brown birds. Until very recently, Chile was also cursed by a lack of a comprehensive and up-to-date field guide. Anyone who has birded in Chile has certainly felt the curse of Braulio Araya and Guillermo Millie's *Guia de Campo de las Aves de Chile*, the outdated and almost useless Field Guide to the Birds of Chile.

Birds of Chile, by a Chilean ex-pat, fills a huge void for a fascinating country and is one of the best single-country field guides to hit the market in many years. It embodies the perfect ideal to which all field guides aspire: ease of use, compact (1.3 x 14 x 21 cm), informative yet concise, loaded with hundreds of gorgeous illustrations, and good maps. The book employs the popular and user-friendly plate with facing page text and rangemap format. Four hundred and seventy-three species are illustrated with an average of 5-6 species per plate, so the plates rarely appear cluttered and intimidating. With a few exceptions (primarily Tyrant Flycatchers) every species is represented by multiple images. For example, a quick examination reveals six illustrations for Kermadec Petrel, 12 for the confusingly variable Common Miner, and a whopping 14 for Variable Hawk. Numerous thumbnails scattered throughout illustrate flight characteristics, useful field marks, plumage variation, habitat, and behaviour. In addition, Latin names are given for all illustrated subspecies, superior to giving the subspecies an arbitrary geographic moniker. The only major flaw with the plates is that several in my copy were printed far too dark and some of these were painted on dark backgrounds confounding the problem.

The text is cutting-edge field identification, presenting everything that is known about Chilean bird identification and distribution as well as a lot that wasn't, at least not until the publication of this guide. Supplementing the outstanding species accounts are introductory chapters on Habitats and Eco-geography of Chile, migration and vagrancy, seabirds, and basics of field identification. There is also a very useful account on the aging and moult of gulls, terns, and jaegers. The inclusion in the Appendix of carefully researched

nomenclatural and taxonomic information cross-referenced with the main text vastly improves the book's usefulness as a general reference for Chile's avifauna. Curiously, my copy lacks Latin names in the Appendix, present in other copies I have seen. Another unfortunate flaw is the lack of several lines of information in a few species accounts. These problems are production errors and will likely be corrected in future printings.

There simply has never been anything of this caliber for Chile. It is a sumptuous delight to thumb through enthralled by the quality of the artwork and the accurate renderings of cryptic and exotic species. Even if one doesn't plan to be heading south to Chile anytime soon, this is a worthwhile book to own, if only to be reminded of how good field guides can be.

Kingbird Highway by Kenn Kaufman [2000]. Mariner Books. \$19.95 CAN (softcover). *Reviewed by Chris Charlesworth.*

Kingbird Highway tells of the epic journeys of a teenaged boy who chased his wildest dreams across North America in pursuit of the record number of bird species seen in one year. At 17 years old Kenn hitch-hiked across the continent, covering over 111,000 kilometres in search of common and rare birds. He was one tough kid, subsisting on crackers and sometimes pet food, saving his minimal budget for plane and ferry tickets to places, like the Probilof Islands, which couldn't be reached by road. His vivid descriptions of the best birding spots from Alaska to Brownsville, Texas, are a delight to read. Despite encounters with the law, wild drivers, and even his own desire to have a girl friend, Kaufman is triumphant in his quest for birds, and discovers, at the same time, his own limits and his own identity. *Kingbird Highway* is not only an important document about the evolution of one of North America's top ornithologists; it is also an entertaining record of the evolution of New World birding, from the fairly obscure and sedate hobby of retired people to the popular and fast growing full-on avian pursuit called birding today. Kaufman captures the 1970s with wit and insight. His fond descriptions of the late Ted Parker and Roger Tory Peterson are enlivening, giving the reader a glimpse of what these birding celebrities were all about. This is a great read.

Handbook of the Birds of the World – Volume 9 Cotingas to Pipits and Wagtails by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliot, and David Christie (editors). [2004]. Lynx Editions. ~\$200 CAN (hardcover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Handbook of the Birds of the World, the massive multi-volume reference to the world's birds, the first to illustrate every species, began publication in 1992 and has since become the standard world reference. The editors, two Spaniards and an Englishman, not only have recruited hundreds of the world's experts to write accounts, but also have avoided most of the delays that plague many other ornithological works. They have published on schedule 9 of the projected 16 volumes, and this is the latest, containing accounts of the races, plumages, feeding habits, breeding habits, voice, distribution, and conservation status of about 800 passerines, including cotingas, manakins, tyrant-flycatchers, New Zealand wrens, scrub-birds, lyrebirds, larks, swallows, pipits and wagtails. Among them are 24 species that regularly occur in BC, plus numerous vagrants and occasional visitors. Species accounts are illustrated by large colour plates (78 of them in Vol. 9) illustrating the major plumages of every species, painted by some of the world's best bird artists. Species accounts range from 1000 (Western Wood-Pewee) to 1500 words (Eastern Kingbird) and end with bibliographies containing 20 to 80 references. In addition, each family is introduced by a detailed overview of systematics, morphology, habitat, general habits, voice, food and feeding habits, breeding movements, relationships with man, and conservation, expressed in clear and simple prose, often with as much text as a small book. These introductions are also accompanied by full bibliographies, plus dozens of high quality color photographs, many printed for the first time. The family introductions are worth the purchase price alone. Quite simply, Handbook of the Birds of World is the best single reference to birds that I know of, indispensable at the international level, and extremely useful at national and regional levels as well.

The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession by Mark Obmascik [2004]. Free Press. \$37.50 CAN (hardcover) ISBN: 0-7432-4545-8. *Reviewed by Richard Mooney.*

The Big Year is an exciting, stimulating and very enjoyable account of three American birders who compete to see as many bird species as possible in one calendar year. Author Mark Obmascik of Sports Illustrated has captured this adventure in what has become a classic of birding literature. The big year begins, logically, on 1 January 1998 with brash self-made man Sandy Komito beginning his obsessive quest. Quiet, retired, affluent Al Levantin begins his big year in his own patch, high in Colorado, while Greg Miller, a computer specialist wounded from a recent divorce stumbles into his big year which he finances by borrowing from his father and maxing-out credit cards. From Attu, AK, to the Dry Tortugas, FL, these three contend to compile the best annual list. Mark Obmascik has created a hard-to-put-down adventure of interest to birders and other outdoor enthusiasts.