

RAPPOLE, J.H. & BLACKLOCK, G.W. 1985. Birds of the Texas Coastal Bend, Abundance and Distribution. Pp. 126, 14 colour plates, 7 black-and-white illustrations, 5 maps. College Station: Texas A. & M. University Press. \$19.50, ISBN 0-89096-221-9.

The coastal bend of Texas is a 100-mile-long stretch of the Gulf of Mexico coast centered on the City of Corpus Christi, Texas. Why such a small piece of real estate should deserve its own avifaunal text may not be readily apparent, but consider that 495 species of birds have been recorded from this area, including 374 on a single 12 square mile patch. Its richness lies in its location at the juncture of the humid temperate zone of eastern North America, the arid temperate zone of western North America, and the arid tropical zone of Mexico. The avifauna is enriched by winter migrants, by climatic opportunists (moving in when suitable conditions develop), and by abutting and overlapping ranges of otherwise recognizable

subspecies. It is a rich and intriguing place, where pre-conceived ideas about which birds one can expect can lead one astray.

The present book is really two books. The mass of the text is a species list annotated with information on status, seasonality and habitat. The lack of descriptions and portraits is not missed, as these are readily available in the several North American field guides. The annotated species accounts include the information that a casual visitor wants at the finger-tips. In addition, though, the book contains a summary of seasonal occurrences ranked in abundance scales, and an appendix of documentation for all species having fewer than five records. The result is an uncluttered text for the casual observer supported by adequate documentation to feed the curiosities of the more serious student of avian ecology and biogeography.

The coastal bend is mostly subtropical scrubland, the subtleties and diversity of which are nearly impossible to comprehend before a visit, a challenge to communicate afterwards, and especially hard to photograph. The authors describe the habitats well and provide a distributional map. In an area of fiercely guarded rights to privacy, a chapter describing accessible localities meets a serious need for the coastal bend bird seeker. But the real triumphs are the 14 colour plates. These photographic representations of various habitats are near miraculous, providing a 'feel for the place' that seems right. Together, the photographs, habitat descriptions and climate data help to dispel a common misconception that the area is one of unremitting aridity.

The bibliography is useful, but prior to this book most information on the area resided not in the published literature but in scattered files and notebooks. Only a few mimeographed local checklists are available. An index to species mentioned in the text is provided, as are short chapters on migration and conservation, the latter perhaps too brief. South Texas is one of the must-see stops on an ornithological tour of North America, and having this book in hand would make such a trip incomparably more productive. Biogeographers would overlook the distributional information at their peril. The book is certainly a worthwhile acquisition for ornithological research libraries.

Clearly, some choices were made by the publisher to keep the length and cost down and the market as broad as possible. It is a tribute to the authors and editors that the technical facts, although much abbreviated, remain to support the generalizations. The authors have provided a comprehensive summary to the knowledge to date on this intriguing place. In a decade or two much more will be known about this avifauna because of the uses to which the book will be put.

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