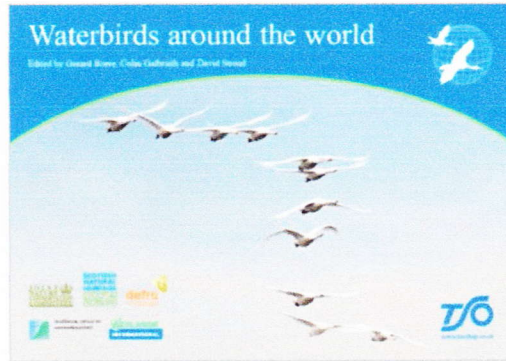


***Shorebirds of North America, Europe, and Asia* (2009), by Richard Chandler.** Princeton University Press, Princeton; and Christopher Helm, London. 448 pages. \$35–softcover.

For waterbird enthusiasts, there always seems to be another book vying for a place on the bookshelf. Aquatic species have it all: They are found almost everywhere, from damp patches in forests to the far reaches of the ocean; they have complex biologies that are in continual need of re-evaluation; they exhibit intriguing and sometimes extreme migratory patterns; they pose tricky, sometimes nearly impossible, identification problems; they are extremely photogenic; and they live in wonderful places that make for wonderful stories. All of which can end up in books. For some books, waterbird enthusiasts need to find space on their shelves; other books, we just should be aware of. Here I review one of each sort.



***Waterbirds around the World* (2006), edited by G. G. Boere, C. A. Galbraith, and D. A. Stroud.** The Stationery Office, Edinburgh. 960 pages. £50–hardcover.

*Shorebirds of North America, Europe, and Asia* is a photographic guidebook to the identification of holarctic shorebirds. To get to the bottom line first: It is excellent and deserves a place on the waterbird enthusiast's bookshelf.

The book begins with chapters on plumage and behavior, both useful in getting the most out of the species accounts that follow. But they are more than that. They are incredibly knowledgeable syntheses of these topics. What stands out is how well the author knows these birds and their literature, how clearly he writes about them, and how well he uses photographs.

The chapter on plumage and molts is a model for such a treatment. The author uses his photographs to create line drawings and then displays the two side by side. Given that the photographs are sharp enough to show every feather, the result is a superior illustrative tool. Terminology used in the book is precisely defined, and al-

ternative terminology is also explained. Frankly, I find Chandler's plumage-and-molt terminology intuitively superior to either the North American "Humphrey and Parkes" or the European *Birds of the Western Palearctic* alternatives. The author goes on to explain the whys and wherefores of molt in ways that help the reader understand why various

plumages occur in the different species, using photographs along the way to emphasize various points.

The shorebird behavior chapter is similarly an outstanding overview of what you might see shorebirds doing, and why they do what they do. The photos are all fascinating and the captions highly informative. The information is up to date, including Robert Elner's 2005 paper that will surely reset thinking about shorebird feeding by revealing that some birds have tongues adapted to feeding on the organic film that forms on the surface of mudflats. This chapter is an excellent short synthesis of shorebird behavior, sure to enhance viewing satisfaction.

Other than a first-rate reference section, the rest of the book consists of species accounts. Each of 20 groups is introduced with an informative précis. Within each group, species accounts cover the following: identification; calls; status and habitat; distribution; racial variation and hybridization; similar species; and references. There are also insightful introductory statements on each species and rather generalized range maps. The text is clear and to the

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point, and much shorter than in comparable books, such as those in the Christopher Helm—A & C Black identification series. I don't think that most readers will miss that extra (and sometimes excessive) detail. This book is about the photos and their captions. There are more than 850 of them, mostly by the author, mostly superb. Species are illustrated by multiple photographs, which are well chosen to show specific diagnostic features that are thoroughly explained in the captions. Again, the clarity of the images is amazing. Nor are these all portraits, as birds are shown in informative postures and behaviors.

By way of example, consider the Semipalmated Sandpiper and Western Sandpiper accounts. Few shorebird identifications are more perplexing than these birds in winter plumage. Each species is carefully described, with the fine points of identification detailed again in the illustration captions. The author's explanations of their subtle sexual dimorphism, migration patterns, and wintering ranges are especially helpful. Differences between the two species—subtle as they are—in bill length, bill shape, crown streaking, and breast streaking are explained and illustrated with great clarity. By studying the text and the photos together, one can almost believe that it is possible to tell them apart. The author uses this incisive approach in a table that compares all the peeps, contrasting seven species over three plumages per species. I doubt these comparisons could be done much better.

How well does the book perform as a photographic guide? I used it this summer to solve a couple of questions I had regarding Bahamian shore-

birds and it worked perfectly. How well does it perform as a book of bird photography? Even better. How did the author get to all the places represented and take these incredible photos? That is a mystery.

The second book reviewed here is a technical treatise on waterbird research and conservation. The title, *Waterbirds around the World*, emphasizes the importance of understanding migration pathways and the many conservation challenges waterbirds face along these routes. The book is a report from a historic congregation of waterbird specialists in 2004—more than 450 of them from 90 countries. It is huge. Weighing nine pounds and just shy of 1,000 pages, it seems to include every word uttered at the conference and probably more. By way of full disclosure, this work includes my introductory remarks for a paper session I chaired.

The conference itself lived up to every aspiration of the organizers, uniting waterbird conservation pioneers from the 1950s, the newly gray-ing soon-to-be elders, and newbie practitioners who will be charged with carrying waterbird conservation forward. Some of the overview contributions will be seminal. The talk by the Prince of Wales showed his deep, sincere, and knowledgeable understanding of the plight of albatrosses: If only the leaders of fishing nations would act on his insights. Summary papers by conference organizers on the history of waterbird conservation and the pertinence and limits of the flyway concept are excellent. Scattered throughout the volume are papers on conservation design, sustainable use, monitoring, and species of

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special concern that constitute important contributions to those topics.

Unfortunately, most of the papers are barely more than expanded—and some not-so-expanded—abstracts made up to look like papers. Few of these do more than provide an introduction to a research or conservation topic. The democratic ideal of giving everyone a couple of pages results in a great deal of superficiality. Taken as whole, however, the book is a complete introduction to current issues and ideas about waterbird conservation. It is worth consulting as an entrée to all these topics, and it can help as a guide for deeper study. It is not a book for the home shelf, or for many library shelves. Perhaps it will be one of the last of the massive, printed, meeting-derived collections that are now more reasonably dispersed by CD or on the web, where any or all of its diverse content would be instantaneously available to potential users.

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