

A BIRD BOOK FOR IOWA

Iowa Birds. James J. Dinsmore, Thomas H. Kent, Darwin Koenig, Peter C. Petersen, and Dean M. Roosa. 1984. Iowa State University Press, Ames. 356 pages. \$27.95 (cloth).

Every regional book on birds should begin with the statement made by these authors that begins the chapter on Species Status: "The true distribution of birds in Iowa, always changing, will never be completely known." Substitute the name of your region and you will have the truest statement made about regional bird books. This is what makes birding such a fascinating hobby, why regional works are revised over and over again, and why a work such as this is so valuable at present for the state of Iowa.

I remember being asked in the 1970's why we were writing *Minnesota Birds, Where, When and How Many*. Did Minnesota need a new work on bird distribution, considering that T. S. Roberts covered the subject with his monumental

treatise *Birds of Minnesota* published in 1932? The answer was an emphatic "yes," a new work was needed. In fact, the one published in 1975 is now out of date and a revision is in preparation!

The authors have prepared an excellent work on the current status of 362 species recorded in Iowa. In the chapter on Definition of Species Status, the categories of occurrence follow the same criteria used in our Minnesota book: i.e., regular, casual, and accidental. The same is true for the frequency terms; abundant, common, uncommon and rare are used throughout the book, as are the criteria of nesting applied to determine whether a species has nested in the state.

On the other hand, I have definite negative feelings about the authors' Classification of Species. The division into eight categories (they say six, but the first is subdivided into three further categories) is cumbersome and in my opinion of little value to the reader. They state that "some authorities writing state bird books have included only species substantiated by existing, well-labeled specimens; others have used all published and even unpublished records. This book takes the middle road." I know of no scholarly, well-researched book on regional distribution that is using unpublished non-verifiable records. I do not feel Iowa has taken the "middle of the road" but has retained the old-fashioned and outmoded term "hypothetical." This term should be deleted from state lists and species that, because of circumstances, cannot be verified beyond a reasonable doubt should be relegated to an appendix or omitted altogether. The Classification of Species as used in *Iowa Birds* should be left for the Iowa Ornithologists' Union Records Committee to use in their work, and not for the reader.

There are excellent chapters on "The Relationship of Birds to Iowa Geography," "History of Iowa Ornithology," and "Breeding and Endangered Species." The Species Accounts that take up the bulk of the book are well done and give a wealth of information on each species in Iowa. Topics covered under each species include status, habitat, spring migration, summer, fall migration, winter, comment, and reference. The latter section is valuable because it is placed within each species account rather than at the end of the book.

At the beginning of the Species Accounts there is a definition of the terms used on the maps. Again, I find the terminology complicated. The use of 12 symbols on two different base maps is just too much for the reader to handle. Why not two symbols showing the current (the last 20-25 years) breeding status of each nesting species; one symbol for positive breeding, the other for inferred breeding?

In general, the authors have done an excellent job in giving us a new up-to-date and accurate picture of Iowa Birds. As can be seen from the above comments, I think they could have done it a little more simply and in a fashion more easily understood by the general birder.

One last comment: it scares me when I look at the price of this book, \$27.95, and read on the title page that the "text in this book was printed from camera-ready copy supplied by the authors." Whatever happened to typesetting?

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