

Book Review: 'Birds of New Jersey'

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Walsh, J., V. Elia, R. Kanc, and T. Halliwell.
1999. *Birds of New Jersey*. New Jersey
Audubon Society, Bernardsville.

B*irds of New Jersey* contains 704 pages crammed with information about the birds of the Garden State. Much of the book is based on data collected for the New Jersey Breeding Bird Atlas between 1993 and 1997. Among other sources heavily relied upon for data on nonbreeding species were Witmer Stone's *Bird Studies at Old Cape May* (1937), David Sibley's *The Birds of Cape May* (1993, 1997), David Fables' *Annotated List of New Jersey Birds* (1955), *New Jersey Nature News* (prior to 1975), and *Records of New Jersey Birds* (1975—publication). Much of the data on the winter distribution of New Jersey's birds was obtained through National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data. Migration data was retrieved from the hawk counts at the Cape May Point Hawkwatch and the Avalon Seawatch.

The introduction provides the reader with some eye-opening statistics about New Jersey, such as the fact that the state has a higher population density per square mile than either India or Japan, and that it has the heaviest road traffic in the nation. (I'm certain any competitor in the World Series of Birding can attest to that!) This chapter also describes a few of the avian wonders of New Jersey: the gathering of thousands of shorebirds feasting on horseshoe crab eggs on the Delaware Bay, the huge concentrations of Greater Scaup on Raritan Bay in early spring, and the large passage of raptors along both the ridges and the coastline. The state bird list at publication stood at 443 species and contains such fantastic finds as Mongolian Plover, Whiskered Tern, Large-billed Tern, Fork-tailed Flycatcher, and

Brown-chested Martin.

There is a chapter describing the physical geography of the state from north to south, and an important chapter titled, "Conservation of New Jersey's Birds," with a set of recommendations for maintaining the "natural integrity" of New Jersey.

There are several chapters devoted to the methods used in gathering data for the Breeding Bird Atlas, such as "Delineation of Blocks," "Field Methods," "Data Handling," and "Map Making." The short chapter titled "Breeding Bird Atlas Results" contains the raw field data that should be of great interest to the many workers and volunteers who supplied the 82,000 records on 210 species found during the project.

It was especially interesting to read about the "specialists" found in each province. The "specialists" are species with a large percentage of their range in one province — for example, Common Raven in the Kittatinny Mountains, Short-eared Owl in the Kittatinny Valley, Mourning Warbler in the Highlands, Dickcissel in the Piedmont, Gull-billed Tern on the Outer Coastal Plain, and Loggerhead Shrike in the Pine Barrens.

The main body of the book consists of the "Species Accounts." There are three types of species accounts: Breeding Bird Accounts, Migrant Accounts, and Rarity Accounts. Each Species Account lists the species' common and scientific name, as well as its range and status in New Jersey. Accounts of breeding birds provide information on habitat preference. A map of the state shows atlas blocks in which each species is recorded in one of three categories: possible, probable, or confirmed breeder. The same map shows physiographic distribution of the species in the various provinces and provides

information on spring, fall, and winter movements. Accounts of migrants include information on general arrival and departure times, as well as maximum numbers recorded. Where appropriate, graphs and figures on seawatch and hawkwatch data are also provided. Vagrant accounts include information on the species' occurrence and, in those species with multiple records, a list showing the location, date, and source of documentation. There are also CBC data regarding historical changes in the species' occurrence.

Three appendices deal directly with the Breeding Bird Atlas. One shows block summaries, which contain information on total breeding species and observers for each block. Another is a gazetteer of town locations, and the third is a brief list of plants mentioned in the species accounts. The appendices are followed by an extensive bibliography and separate species index for common and Latin names. A pocket on the back cover contains four overlay maps to be used when examining the atlas maps. There are maps for Physiographic Regions, Human Population, Forest Cover, and Elevation. As an added bonus the text is accentuated by 46 wonderful illustrations by David Sibley.

So, is this book practical? Is it birder friendly? Can someone use this book to find birds or plan a birding trip to New Jersey? The answer is a resounding yes! This book provides essential data on when and where to find specific breeding birds. If I want to look for a Common Raven in summer, the book tells me that I'd better spend most of my time in the Highlands of northern New Jersey, as this is where most atlas blocks recorded the species. If I'm looking for breeding Summer Tanagers, I should be in the Outer Coastal Plain or the Pine Barrens, where this species was most commonly found. I can also tell that my chances of finding a Mississippi Kite are more favorable if I search in Cape May from mid-May to mid-June than if I try in fall, when there were only three records from 1991 to 1998.

The one flaw of this book may lie in the sheer volume of information it contains, which I feel may have been better presented in two separate books.

One of these could be a dedicated breeding-bird atlas (similar to those published in Pennsylvania, New York, and Colorado) in which more detail could be given regarding habitat specifics, egg dates, and relative safe dates for nesters. With a dedicated breeding-bird atlas, the maps could have been enlarged to show the county distribution more effectively.

Together with a dedicated breeding-bird atlas, I would have also preferred a separate book discussing the state's overall birdlife. In this book, there could be room for an expanded discussion on migrants and winter residents, with more specific arrival and departure information. The discussion of vagrant species could be expanded from the present bland chronological list of occurrences by adding background information on the circumstances surrounding some of the findings. I would have also preferred a larger format and layout, as some pages seemed too crowded, the graphs and maps seem too small, and the use of boxes for range and status is a bit distracting.

With these few minor inconveniences aside, *Birds of New Jersey* is a wealth of practical information and should be an essential part of the library of any dedicated Delaware Valley birder.

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