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Western Birds



Roger Tory Peterson

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A Field Guide to Western Birds

A Completely New Guide to
Field Marks of All Species
Found in North America
West of the 100th Meridian
and North of Mexico

• *Third Edition* •

Completely Revised and Enlarged

Sponsored by the National Audubon Society,
the National Wildlife Federation,
and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

Boston New York

to the memory of

CLARENCE BEAL

and

JAMES FISHER

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Introduction

In 1934 my first *Field Guide* was published, covering the birds east of the 90th meridian in North America. Later this was extended to the 100th meridian on the Great Plains. This book was designed so that live birds could be readily identified at a distance by their "field marks," without resorting to the bird-in-hand characters that the early collectors relied on. During the following half century the binocular and the spotting scope have replaced the shotgun.

The "**Peterson System**," as it now is called, is based on patternistic drawings with arrows that pinpoint the key field marks. These rather formal schematic illustrations and the direct comparisons between similar species are the core of the system, a practical method that has gained universal acceptance not only on this continent but also in Europe, where *Field Guides* now exist in 12 languages. This system, which is, in a sense, a pictorial key based on visual impressions rather than on technical features, has been extended to other branches of natural history and there are now about 40 titles in the Field Guide Series.

It was William Vogt, the first editor of *Audubon* magazine, who suggested that I put together a *Field Guide* using my visual approach to field identification, which I had already presented in articles in *Nature Magazine* and *Field and Stream*. After a preliminary draft of the book had been politely turned down by several publishers, Francis Allen, veteran editor of Houghton Mifflin, and a star birder himself, saw the validity of the new approach, and the rest is history. His successor, Paul Brooks, continued to carry on the editorial tradition.

Shortly after the first edition of the eastern *Field Guide* saw the light of day, Clinton G. Abbott, then director of the Natural History Museum at San Diego, asked why I didn't do a similar field guide for the West. I dismissed the idea at first, thinking that although the plan worked well for eastern North America, it would be a much more formidable task to attempt the same for the West. However, after prompting by Guy Emerson, then chairman of the National Audubon Society, I gave it a try. After tussling with a few of the problems, I concluded that field identification was not much more difficult in the West, and that most publications made things look more involved and clumsy than need be. There was already one excellent field handbook

in use—Ralph Hoffmann's *Birds of the Pacific States*—but this covered only the states of Washington, Oregon, and California, whereas there was hardly anything of pocket size that was adequate for most other parts of the West.

This edition of *A Field Guide to Western Birds* is more than a revision; it is almost completely new, with 165 plates, as against 136 in the 1961 edition. None of the previous color plates of the western *Field Guide* has been retained. However, 24 plates have been borrowed from the latest eastern *Field Guide to the Birds* (1980), 30 others have been modified, and 111 plates are completely new. All species are now shown in color. The waterfowl are repeated in monochrome, because their flight patterns are more clearly diagnosed in that way.

There are also 441 three-color maps, a new feature. My wife, Virginia Marie Peterson, and I researched these together and she then carefully carried out their execution. Her trained hand and eye had previously been employed at the U.S. Coast Guard Research and Development Center, where she worked out critical methods for identifying oil spills by means of infrared spectroscopy. Virginia wrote the original *Infrared Field Manual for Oil Spill Identification*. She also prepared the 390 maps in the 1980 edition of the eastern *Field Guide to the Birds*.

With this new third edition, long overdue, the *Field Guide to Western Birds* has really come of age. Years ago I had concluded that for comparative purposes the ideal number of species per color plate would be about four (rather than ten or twelve, as in previous editions), but the cost factor prohibited this ideal format when we first broke ground. The success of the *Field Guide*, with its well-tested practical system, has grown steadily over the years, and the economics of distribution as well as technical advances in fine offset printing made it possible to surmount earlier restraints.

The *Field Guide* user will find one major format change that will be particularly helpful: species accounts, except in a few instances, now face the corresponding illustrations. Because of the success of this formula in the latest revision of the eastern *Field Guide*, many birders urged me to arrange text and plates of the western *Field Guide* in this way, and I have done so, but because of space limitations, maps are separate.

Area of this Field Guide: This guide covers North America west of the 100th meridian, as shown in the map on p. 2. Rather than a restrictive political boundary, an ecological one is more practical. In the U.S. the logical division of the avifauna is along the belt between the 100th meridian (midway across Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas) and the edge of the Rockies. This is by no means a sharp division, but people living in that ecological "twilight zone" will find that *A Field Guide to Western Birds* covers all species they are likely to encounter. In a

general way, eastern birds follow the valleys west, while the western forms edge eastward along the more arid uplands. In Canada, eastern influences extend much further west, bridging the gap to the Rockies via the conifer forests north of the Great Plains.

The birds in the western third of Texas (the Panhandle and west of the Edwards Plateau) are covered in this *Field Guide*. Not so those in the lower Rio Grande Valley, where many western species reach their eastern outposts and a few very special Mexican species occur. These will be found in *A Field Guide to the Birds of Texas* (No. 13 in the Field Guide Series). Texas is the only state with its own *Field Guide*.

In the 1961 edition, I included a separate 32-page section on the Hawaiian Islands. Because of the excellent new *Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific* by Douglas Pratt, Phillip Bruner and Delwyn Berrett, and also the latest edition of *Hawaii's Birds* edited by R.J. Shallenberger (published by the Hawaiian Audubon Society), I have chosen to omit that section and to devote those pages to a more in-depth treatment of Alaska, the Aleutians, and the Bering Sea area.

Drawings vs. Photographs: Because of the increasing sophistication of birders, I have leaned more toward detailed portraiture in the new illustrations while trying not to lose the patternistic effect developed in the earlier editions. A drawing can often do more than a photograph to emphasize field marks. A photograph is a record of a fleeting instant; a drawing is a composite of the artist's experience. The artist can edit out, show field marks to best advantage, and delete unnecessary clutter. He can also choose position and stress basic color and pattern unmodified by transitory light and shade. A photograph is subject to the vagaries of color-temperature (Kelvin), make of film, exposure, time of day, sunlight, open shade, use of flash, angle of view, skill of the photographer, and just plain luck. The artist has more options and far more control even though he may at times use photographs for reference. This is not a diatribe against photography; I am an obsessive photographer as well as a painter and therefore am fully aware of the pitfalls and the differences. Whereas a photograph can have a living immediacy, a good drawing is more instructive as a teaching device.

Subspecies: These simply represent subdivisions within the geographic range of a species. They are races, usually determined by morphological characteristics such as slight differences in measurements, shades of color, etc. These subtle subdivisions can usually be distinguished with accuracy only by collecting birds with a gun or a mist net and comparing them with museum specimens. The distinctions, often vague, are seldom apparent in the field. Subspecies have a meaning to the student

of bird distribution and evolution and are of practical value to those involved in conservation and wildlife management practices. Should occasion demand, the scholar can refer to his copy of the older 5th edition of the Checklist of the American Ornithologists' Union (A.O.U.), which gave a detailed breakdown of races and their ranges. The 6th edition (1983) does so only in a very general way. However, in this new edition of the *Field Guide*, a few subspecies are recognized when field distinctions are obvious. One of the most controversial examples is the western "Bullock's" Oriole, which is now lumped with the eastern "Baltimore" Oriole under the new name Northern Oriole. "Myrtle" and "Audubon's" warblers are now lumped as the Yellow-rumped Warbler. Most of the juncos have also been lumped. The earlier names and a few others have been retained (in quotes) in deference to long-established usage. Names that were used in the 1961 edition of this book but which have since been changed by the Checklist Committee are in parentheses under the current name. We can expect further changes by the A.O.U.

The Ranges of Birds: A number of species have been added to the avifauna of western North America since the previous edition of this *Field Guide* was published in 1961. Notable is the Cattle Egret, which spread explosively after it arrived in the U.S. about 1952. Several eastern species are pushing west and a few exotic escapes, especially parrots, are doing well and may become established.

The ranges of many species have changed markedly during the past 50 years. Some are expanding because of decades of protection; others have diminished alarmingly or have dropped out of parts of their range due to environmental changes. The passion for bird feeding has had its effect on expanding the ranges of several species.

The Maps: Instead of detailed range accounts, maps are now employed; they have been conveniently assembled in a separate section (pp. 359–408). Because the projections are large enough to show state and provincial lines, ranges are now defined more critically. However, the Aleutians, extending more than 1,000 miles to the west of the Alaska Peninsula, are not shown, but any pertinent information about these islands is included in notes on the maps. For quick use, the map section is marked with a gray corner that serves as a thumb index. By grouping the maps we can update them more frequently without affecting the rest of the pagination. Our knowledge of bird distribution is becoming ever more exact because of the proliferation of field observers. Not only are some birds extending their ranges, but so are the birders.

Although many birds (waterfowl, game birds, seabirds) had already been mapped continentally in the *Handbook of North*

American Birds (edited by R. S. Palmer) and in other books, Virginia Peterson and I researched our own maps using state and regional sources, but we found these very uneven. Some western states already had good to excellent "latilongs," but only now are they becoming involved in more detailed atlasings.

Acknowledgments: The specimen material used in the preparation of the new color plates came almost entirely from the cabinets of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. I am deeply grateful to the staff and curators of the Department of Ornithology of that institution for their assistance, and specifically to Dean Amadon, Allison Andors, Chris Blake, John Bull, Robert Dickerman, Eugene Eisenmann, John Farrand, Stuart Keith, Wesley Lanyon, Mary Le Croy, Allan O'Connor, Lester Shortt, and Françoise Villeumier.

Space prevents me from listing again the mass of ornithological literature digested in the preparation of the earlier editions of the *Field Guide to Western Birds*, as well as the regional works, checklists, papers, and periodicals that went into the compilation of this one. Assiduously I consulted them all and intentionally ignored none. A list of these sources is on file and available in my library.

Nor shall I list again the 200 or more field companions, correspondents, and others who contributed notes or helped in other ways in previous editions and those who were involved in their production. Their names are in the Preface of the second edition [revised and enlarged, 1961]. However, I would like to acknowledge again two people who played especially important roles: Edgar Kincaid, who sharpened my critical senses, and Barbara Peterson, who typed and retyped the manuscripts a number of times, offered suggestions, and helped in many other tangible ways.

In preparing the new maps, Virginia Peterson and I consulted all of the pertinent state and regional books in the *Special Book Supplement* prepared by *American Birds*, and, equally important, the files of *American Birds*, which is published by the National Audubon Society, 950 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

The breeding birds of Canada had already been mapped in *Birds of Canada* by Earl Godfrey, who generously made the updated version of these maps available to us prior to publication. Paul Johnsgard was also very generous, letting us see much of his own material prior to publication in several of his books. Don Roberson's scholarly *Rare Birds of the West Coast* was indispensable when dealing with casuals and accidentals, as was the *Distributional Checklist of North American Birds* by David De Sante and Peter Pyle.

The problem of covering Alaska adequately was solved when Pete Isleib, a peerless and indefatigable observer, prepared for us

three albums of large-scale maps, based largely on years of research by his associates, Dan Gibson and Brina Kessel. They were then checked further by Peter Connors, James King, and John Wright. These maps cover every species known to have occurred in Alaska.

Before my wife, Virginia, finalized her cartography, she sent out a number of selected maps to the following authorities for fine-tuning: Stephen Bailey (Calif.), Mark Collie (Idaho), Phillip Detrich (Calif.), Jon Dunn (Calif.), Kimball Garrett (Calif.), Eugene Hunn (Wash.), Kenn Kaufman (Ariz.), Hugh Kingery (Colo.), Paul Lehman (Calif.), Guy McCaskie (Calif.), Joseph Morlan (Calif.), Vince Mowbray (Nev.), Dennis Paulson (Wash.), Don Roberson (Calif.), Oliver Scott (Wyo.), Arnold Small (Calif.), Ella Sorensen (Utah), Rich Stallcup (Calif.), Allan Stokes (Utah), Stephen Summers (Ore.), Daniel Taylor (Idaho), Thede Tobish (Alaska), Charles Trost (Idaho), R. E. Walters, Jr. (Utah), Ralph Widrig (Wash.), Kevin Zimmer (N.M.), and Dale Zimmerman (N.M.).

The following people gave us additional help on specifics concerning the maps: Frederick and Margarite Baumgartner, Stephen Bissell, Tom Cade, William S. Clark, James Grier, Donald Klebenow, T. E. Lebedz, Richard and Robert Lewin, Carl Mortis, Harry Nehls, W. J. Plowden-Wardlaw, Noble Proctor, J. V. Remsen, Jr., T. D. Reynolds, Chandler S. Robbins, Thomas Rogers, S. E. Senner, J. M. Scott, Brian Sharp, Alison Speirs, Sally Spoford, S. Sturts, J. F. Stetter, J. B. Tatum, Joseph Taylor, Dan Varland, Linda Westervelt, Miriam Westervelt, Herb Wisner, and C. Zeillemaker.

In addition, the following birders, through correspondence, reading portions of the text, or personal contact, made suggestions for this revision or helped in some other way: Peter Alden (who fine-combed the entire text), Jeff Altman, Elisha Atkins, Harold Axtell, Larry Balch, Benton Basham, Chuck Bernstein, Laurence Binford, Eirik Blom, Jon Boone, Kenneth Brandes, Don Bronk, Ted Chandik, Allegra Collister, Susan Roney Drennan, Bruce Duncan, Brian A. Evans, Robert Frisch, Frank Gill, John D. Goodman, Campbell Grant, William E. Grenfell, Jr., William W. H. Gunn, James E. Halferty, Theodora Halladay, Ed Harper, Donald S. Heintzelman, John P. Hubbard, Douglas James, Joseph R. Jehl, Jr., H. A. Kantrud, Robert E. Kennedy, Ben King, Edward A. Kutac, Greg Lasley, Gary R. Lingle, Steve Makara, David Messineo, Gale Monson, Ron Naveen, Kerry Pado, Ted Parker, Allan R. Phillips, Richard Rimmer, Terry Root, Gary Rosenberg, Margaret Rusk, Stephen Russell, R. A. Rylander, Fred Ryser, Paul T. Schnell, Ralph Shreiber, P. S. Skaar, Rich Stallcup, Robert A. Sundell, Paul W. Sykes, Jr., Ross L. Teuber, Florence J. Thornburg, Francis B. Vanslager, Richard Veit, Robert E. Walters, Lilia and Gordon Weber, Claudia Wilds, David Wolf, Bryce Wood, and Alan Wormington.

We owe special thanks to Seymour Levin, who devised a mapping system that protected the accuracy of Virginia Peterson's original cartography and saved her much time in preparing the final maps for the printer.

Putting a field guide together so that everything fits is a challenge comparable to a jig-saw puzzle or a game of chess. A thousand details were put in the hands of my secretary, Charles W. Schulze, who was helped by Jeannette Speirs and Dwight Macdonald, my studio assistants. In addition to handling an avalanche of correspondence, Mr. Schulze retyped the manuscript half a dozen times so that it would be in the best possible form for my editors.

At Houghton Mifflin, Harry Foster was on top of things from the beginning, working closely with Austin Olney and Jon Latimer. He was always just a phone call away and in turn relied on Barbara Stratton, a model of editorial thoroughness, who fine-tuned the manuscript and worked with Anne Chalmers, Brenda Lewis, Donna Muise, and Steve Pekich in readying everything for the typesetter and printer.

The quality of the color work is the result of close collaboration with the above people and the printer, Case-Hoyt of Rochester, N.Y., under the critical eyes of Dan Cooney, George Hannon, Jon Latimer, Brenda Lewis, Paul Nederlk, Wayne Oakley, Thomas Reetz, the color evaluator, Priscilla Sharpless, and Conrad Ward. In addition, Mrs. Peterson carefully checked all proofs of the maps with Dan Cooney, Brenda Lewis, Thomas Reetz, and Conrad Ward.

A field guide is a complex team effort, starting with the field observers and ending with the printer. I want to extend my deepest thanks to everyone involved.

Bird Songs and Calls

Not everything useful for identifying birds can be crammed into a single pocket-sized *Field Guide*. In the species accounts I have included a brief entry on **Voice**, and I have done this in my own way, trying to give the reader some handle on the songs or calls he hears. Authors of bird books have attempted with varying success to fit songs into syllables, words, and phrases. Musical notations, comparative descriptions, mnemonics, and even ingenious systems of symbols have also been employed. But since the advent of sound recording these other techniques have been eclipsed. A visual spin-off of the tape recording is the sonogram, but most people are not sufficiently oriented technologically to be able to interpret sonograms easily.

Use the recently revised *Field Guide to Western Bird Songs* (No. 2A in the Field Guide Series); it is available on records and cassettes. This comprehensive collection of sound recordings includes the calls and songs of more than 500 land and water birds—a large percentage of all the species found in western North America. They were recorded and prepared under the direction of the Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University. To prepare yourself for your field trips play the records or cassettes; then read the descriptions in this *Field Guide* for clues.

Birding by Ear: Eastern and Central (No. 38 in the Field Guide Series) by Richard K. Walton and Robert Lawson is another excellent shortcut to learning songs. These new cassettes, published by Houghton Mifflin, compare similar songs and analyze them for you. In learning bird voices (and some birders do 90 percent of their field work by ear) there is no substitute for the actual sounds. *Birding by Ear* will help you to systematize things and get your act together. It is basically for the eastern parts of the continent, but a companion volume for the West (No. 41) will soon be published.

Bird Nests

Most birders are not too skilled at finding nests. In most cases there would be an appalling gap between the number of species ticked off on their checklists and the number of nests they have discovered. To remedy this, Hal Harrison, the premier nest photographer, has prepared *A Field Guide to Western Bird Nests*. This *Field Guide* (No. 25 in the Field Guide Series) will expand your ornithological expertise.

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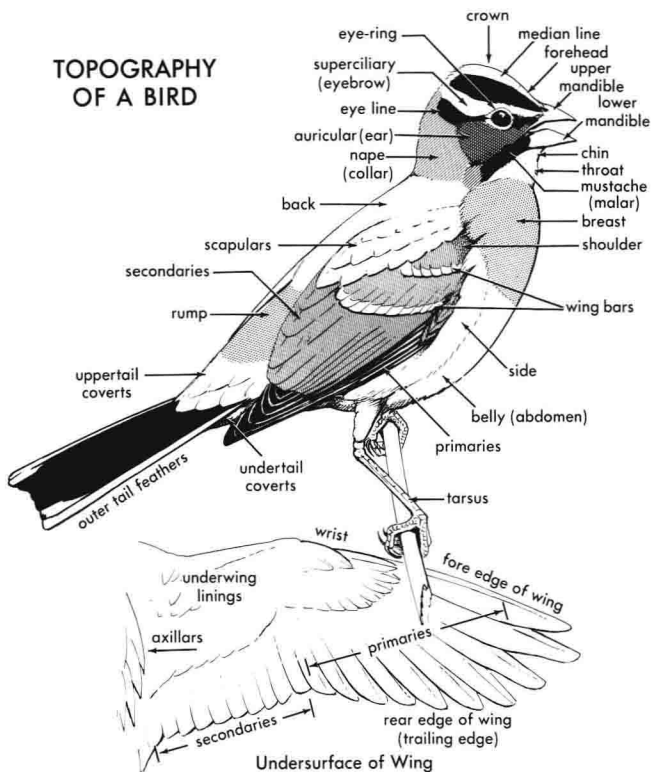
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TOPOGRAPHY OF A BIRD



Other Terms Used in this Book

Sex symbols: ♂ means male, ♀ means female. These symbols are used frequently on the plates.

Accidental: In the area of this book, recorded fewer than a dozen times, far out of range (see maps, pp. 359–408). On the state level only one, two, or three records; might not be expected again.

Casual: Very few records, but might be expected again because the normal range of the species is in an adjacent state or province, or not too distant.

Introduced: Not native; deliberately released.

Exotic: Not native; either released or escaped.

In part: Subdivision of a family; or part of a species, such as a well-marked subspecies.