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Douglas H. Johnson
Northern Prairie Science Center

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NEOTROPICAL MIGRANT BIRDS

Conservation and Management of Neotropical Migrant Landbirds in the Northern Rockies and Great Plains. David S. Dobkin. 1994. University of Idaho Press, Moscow. 220 pages. $29.95 (paper).

The latest vogue in bird conservation is concern over species that breed in the United States and Canada but winter mostly south of the United States-Mexico border. Many neotropical migrant birds have declined in number recently (although many have not). It is perhaps convenient to blame deforestation and other environmental abuses in the tropics for the declines in "our" birds, rather than to look inward at the abuses we in the United States have inflicted. Nonetheless, the concern about neotropical migrants, institutionalized by the Partners in Flight program, has served several purposes. For one, biologists are taking a broader view of the problems these birds face, including breeding-season, migrational, and wintering processes. Also, there is a clearer acknowledgment that political boundaries are not recognized by migratory birds, which has fostered greater international cooperation. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, managers have been sensitized to the plight of the birds and the need to "do something" about their problems.

Dobkin's book arose from a report commissioned by the U.S. Forest Service--a major player in the Partners in Flight program--to satisfy a need for a regional handbook for these species. The report was issued as a government publication in 1992, and updated, reformatted, and copyrighted in the present volume. The geographical area covered is the Forest Service's Northern Region, a biologically meaningless conglomeration: all of Montana and North Dakota, northern Idaho, northern slices of Wyoming and South Dakota, and eastern Washington. Accordingly, the book deals with both forests and grasslands.

The book's introduction presents a brief review of general issues such as habitat fragmentation, predation and brood parasitism, and deforestation and other wintering problems. Dobkin then focuses on western North America, where less information is available. He notes that western neotropical migrants were not declining overall, but many grassland and shrubsteppe species have been.

Dobkin next surveys common management practices and their effects on birds, treating in turn coniferous forests, deciduous forests, and grasslands and shrubsteppe. A repeated theme is that little is known about the effects on birds of common natural processes and management practices, including fire and livestock grazing. He repeats the recommendation by Bock et al. (*Conserv. Biol.* 7:731-733, 1993) to dramatically increase the amount of public rangeland from which livestock are permanently excluded, recognizing that few private holdings maintain such habitat and the species it supports.

The bulk of the book consists of one-page species accounts covering 144 neotropical migrant landbirds that breed in the region. For each species, Dobkin presents a code for its wintering area, habitat requirements, food habits, population status as determined from Breeding Bird Survey trends, management issues, and some citations for further reading. Trends are only through 1985, and thus are already out of date. Maps present the range of each species within the region, based on information from several sources. Those maps are variable in spatial resolution and timeliness, depending on the source of information.

I noted several typographical errors and, without really trying, detected a reference not included in the Literature Cited section. The book has some utility as a general introduction to the species of the area and their status, but its value is diminished by the artificial geographical boundaries, obsolete information on population trends, and necessarily superficial treatment of each species.--*Douglas H. Johnson, Northern Prairie Science Center, Jamestown, ND 58401.*