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Review of *Baby Bird Portraits by George Miksch Sutton* by Paula A. Johnsgard

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Baby Bird Portraits by George Miksch Sutton. Paul A. Johnsgard. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. xiii+81 pp. Plates, photos, references. \$19.95 cloth (ISBN 0-8061-2985-9).

I love this book. First and foremost, it is a collection of important paintings beautiful in their own right. George Miksch ("Doc") Sutton was

one of the most influential ornithologists and bird artists of the twentieth century and a leader in painting living birds in the field. Among his more important contributions were several paintings of nestling and young birds, many of them now in a collection at Chicago's Field Museum. *Baby Bird Portraits* reproduces thirty-four of these studies, many for the first time, in outstanding color, making them available in a single volume.

This is a significant book both for aesthetic and scientific reasons. The portraits are charming, and they are accurate, reflecting Doc Sutton's eye for detail. Painted from living models, the colors too are accurate, in a sphere where accurate plates, in some instances, cannot be found in other sources. Writing this as a person who studies sparrows, I value the twenty-seven paintings of rarely illustrated cardinal grosbeaks and New World sparrows as a particularly welcome addition to the literature. In many instances the plates include detailed drawings of legs and feet. Some of these, published earlier in several short papers, proved a significant resource for my *Guide to the Sparrows of the United States and Canada* (1996). It is a joy to have them reprinted and available in one place.

Sutton has a knack for painting down and feathers so subjects look "soft and cuddly"; the two nestling cardinals reproduced on the book's jacket exemplify this skill. Though devoted to nestling and juvenile birds, the volume includes a few paintings of adults, my favorite being Plate 31 of the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. These are subtly beautiful birds, and it is the rare painting that captures this subtlety.

Paul Johnsgard, a well-known scientist and prolific popularizer of ornithology in his own right, provides the book's genuinely informative text, which is often warm and personal. There are a few minor errors. To say that the Latin name of the Eastern Towhee, *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*, "roughly" translates to "red-eyed sparrow" seems a stretch; "red-eyed chirper," or "red-eyed twitterer" is closer to the Latin. And the type specimen of the Savannah Sparrow is from the Aleutian Islands, not Savannah, Georgia, although Alexander Wilson's *Fringilla Savanna* (a younger synonym) did indeed come from Savannah, thus giving the species its English vernacular name. Such slips are truly minor, however, and do not detract from the book's considerable value.

For each species, there is a short but useful list of suggested readings; and over seventy titles are listed in the "Literature Cited," including twenty-one by Doc Sutton. Birders, research scientists, and lovers of avian art alike will find this handsome volume rewarding and useful. It is well worth the price. **James D. Rising**, *Department of Zoology, University of Toronto*.