

Book Reviews

ZOOLOGY

Birds of Azerbaijan

By Michael Patrikeev. 2004. Pensoft Publishers, Geo Milev Street 13a, 1111 Sofia, Bulgaria. 500 pages, U.S. \$177.50 Cloth.

Several years ago I took a small map and shaded the countries for which you could purchase a good bird guide. There were two key gaps. One zone ran from eastern Turkey to Afghanistan (and the other was Brazil). The best books you could get for this former region (the Caucasus) was the *Birds of Russia* by Flint Boehme, Kostin and Kuznetsor or *Birds of the Soviet Union* by Dementiev and Gladkov (both nearly 50 years old). This new book covers the 372 species that have been recorded in the Republic of Azerbaijan and fills in some of that area with poor coverage.

Azerbaijan lies on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, to the north of Iran and east of Turkey. A southern section of Armenia clips off a small enclave called Noxçivan. It has a varied topography with the consequent diversity of bird species. This book covers this troubled region. There were wars in the 1800s with imperial Russia, civil war between 1917-1920, attacks by the Turks from the 1950s onwards, and still the area has an ongoing dispute with neighbouring Armenia. The struggles, along with changing economic and political status has led to some discontinuity in the study of birds. Separation from the USSR in 1991 lost the services of the Russian science community and this lack of continuous research shows in the data cited. Much of the information used by the author is from before the mid-1990s. There are some later references, but these are much fewer. Separation from the former USSR also caused economic difficulties from which the country has yet to emerge.

Birds of Azerbaijan is a distributional atlas, not a field guide. The author has compiled data from a large variety of sources, much from the "Russian" era. For example the data on Mallard is primarily prior to 1996. [We have seen with our work on the *Breeding Bird Atlas of Ontario* what an amazing difference a gap of ten years in the data can make]. The author has added his own extensive observations taken between 1970

and 1991. The story is quite gloomy. For example, many thousands of Red-breasted Geese were seen in the 1950s, but the species is considered virtually extinct now. Even the Eurasian Coot has dropped from millions to tens of thousands. The reasons for these changes include severe air, soil, and water pollution. Soil pollution results from oil spills, DDT and defoliants used in the production of cotton, making the Caspian Sea one of the most ecologically degraded areas in the world. Less gloomy, but equally distressing is the lack of current information on some species, for example Red Kite.

It is against this background that the author has done a sterling job of pulling the known information on this country's birds into a logical, readable text. Each species account has status, distribution, population size, migratory movements, breeding information, diet and mortality. The English names are used throughout, while Azaeri names are added for many species. A respectably-sized distribution map has codes for summer, winter, nesting, etc. for most species. The author gives an annotated bird list and describes important bird areas, places for colonial birds, waterfowl wintering areas, and the influence of cold winters and oil pollution. There are 78 photographs, of which one third show habitat, one third are bird photos and the rest are of eggs and nests. The habitat photographs show the nine basic types of landscapes from alpine meadows in mountains to semi-desert and wetland. But he does not illustrate the rust and mauve mountains of the Caucasus located in the troubled Naxçivan Autonomous District nor of any arid badlands. There is not full coverage of the 50 Important Bird Areas identified by the author.

Given the way the Azaeri economy has languished as regional trade has suffered and the underdeveloped oil production has yet to fulfill its promise, this book may be a very important milestone in a continuing tragic ornithological history.

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Birds of New Brunswick: An Annotated List

By David S. Christie, Brian E. Dalzell, Marcel David, Robert Doiron, Donald G. Gibson, Mike H. Lushington, Peter A. Pearce, Stuart I. Tingley, and James G. Wilson. 2004. New Brunswick Museum Monographic Series (Natural Science) Number 10, 277 Douglas Avenue, Saint John,

New Brunswick, E2K 1E5. 2004. 83 pages. [Also available in French.]

This publication appeared in the same series as the two previous summaries (hereafter "lists") of bird status