

BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

R. U. Abyrdar II with Sy Schiff

This month's book is where the "bird story" begins — in the nest! *Into the Nest: Intimate Views of the Courting, Parenting and Family Lives of Familiar Birds* by Laura Erickson and Marie Read, with support from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is an important companion to your field guide. It offers a rare glimpse into the breeding and nesting cycles of some of our most familiar birds — from raptors and hummingbirds to woodpeckers and wrens. Now Sy offers his opinion and review:

This book pretty much covers the topic in its subtitle. Part 1 examines the Facts of Bird Life (Courting and Mating, Enter the Egg, and Nesting and Parenting). This short beginning covers in exquisite very brief detail everything from the chicken to the egg and back. It is accompanied by lovely photographs illustrating the points discussed.

There is a complete discussion of precocial and altricial nestlings, and how they survive. This is the period when the newly hatched imprint on their mothers and why one should never pick up young birds. Just put them back in the nest or hide them in a close bush.

After the above, Part 2 proceeds to a detailed look of the life history of a representative of the bird families chosen. The first bird covered is a duck, the Mallard. I learned that when the male Mallard jumps on a female in the water, he's not defending territory or chasing the bird away. Mallards prefer to use the water rather than the land. It's hard to escape in the water. So far, no hen has complained to the authorities.



Twenty-five families are covered and in some cases more than one bird per family. All are familiar birds, from the Mallard to the American Goldfinch. The shorebirds are represented by the Killdeer; a logical choice since the bulk of shorebirds breed in the far Arctic. Almost all the land birds are familiar local breeders, including Mourning Doves, chickadees, House Wrens, bluebirds, and American Robins.

When two species are closely related and rear their young in similar fashion, they are treated together with any differences clearly noted. For example, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers both nest in cavities. The ins and outs of cavity nesting are explored and described.

Each bird is lavishly illustrated, from nest, eggs, newly hatched, feeding, to fledglings. The story stops at this point. Adults are not the thrust of this book. The pictures show aspects of bird life not often seen and then only in special cases such as this book.

Part 3 is a series of small maps showing the breeding, migrating, and winter range of the described species, so that you know where they are in case you want to look for them. Also included are nesting facts: clutch size, egg-shell color, broods per season, and a cross reference to the page number of the species' account.

This is a different kind of book, fully describing in detail an aspect of bird life and behavior not found elsewhere. You'll learn all about fidelity, who does the work of rearing the young, who defends the nest, and how the young cope and mature.

If you're a lister, "who cares?" But if you want to increase your knowledge of birds, this is an indispensable book.

R. U.'s conclusion: As Sy opines, this is an indispensable read! Enjoy!!

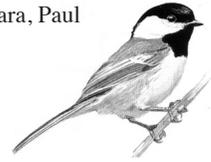


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