

tional classification. Elphick often notes in the text that recent molecular studies support some very different relationships, such as the affinity of passeriforms, parrots, falcons, and seriemas, and acknowledges that some groups, such as Gruiformes and Pelecaniformes, are polyphyletic. For each chapter, a box summarizes the number of genera and species, size range, distribution and habitat, social and reproductive biology, food, voice, migration, and conservation status. The description of each family is often remarkably detailed, citing interesting information about many or most of the genera. For the sandpiper family (Scolopacidae), for example, we learn about the kinetic bill of snipe and some other genera, the long-distance transoceanic migration of the Bar-tailed Godwit (more than 7000 miles, nonstop, in one case), the recent extinction of the once abundant Eskimo Curlew, and the desperate condition of the nearly extinct Spoon-billed sandpiper. Five pages and 10 photographs provide mini-portraits of many of the genera of fringillid finches, and touch on, *inter alia*, the spread of House finches in eastern North America following their introduction from the west, the complex variation among crossbill populations, and the adaptive radiation of Hawaiian honeycreepers. As far as I can tell, the information throughout the book is highly accurate, with very minor exceptions—for example, the Evening Grosbeak has not had the status of “a familiar bird of North American gardens and parks as well as forests and woodlands” (p. 569) for several decades.

Perhaps because *The World of Birds* is addressed to a general audience, Elphick does not dwell on the conceptual background of some of the topics he describes. For example, there is not a single phylogenetic tree in the book, despite many statements about relationships. He ascribes the evolution of male display characteristics to female choice of genetically superior males, without mentioning that this is only one of several hypotheses, and has been supported in only some of many studies. In some discussions, such as the advantages of flocking, little distinction is made between group-level and individual benefits. Elphick may have decided that introducing evolutionary theory was inappropriate for his audience, but the broad, enthusiastic readership of books such as those by Dawkins and Gould suggests that clear descriptions of fundamental concepts such as natural selection would not be out of place.

The end-matter includes an excellent glossary, an appendix on Birdlife/IUCN Red-list threat categories for the more than 1200 species at risk of extinction, and a selection of books and other resources for the topic in each chapter. It is a pity that the volume is not coupled to an online bibli-

ography of the many hundreds of journal articles that Elphick drew on in the immense effort that went into writing this book: many users would surely like to learn more about some of the countless interesting facts that the author relates.

Well written, immensely informative, and truly beautiful, *The World of Birds* is an outstanding achievement. If you are looking for the ideal gift for the birder or the budding naturalist in your life, this publication will fit the bill.

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HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD ALIVE.

By Lynx Edicions. Barcelona (Spain): Lynx Edicions. €29.95, with registration fee of €20. This is an online project that reinterprets the 17-volume printed series. [Information about HBW Alive can be found at <http://www.hbw.com>.]

From 1992 to 2013, a 17-volume encyclopedia was compiled that was the most comprehensive and informative of any ornithological resource to date—*Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Over the period that this series was being created, the amount of biological information generated and the nature of the retrieval of biological information changed profoundly. Now there is a new resource that is even more comprehensive, and it is a resource that is being constantly updated in real time to reflect ongoing discoveries in the field of ornithology. This invaluable resource is *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive* (<http://www.hbw.com>).

Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive is a Web-based reference resource that provides the information found in *Handbook of the Birds of the World* volumes, with many additional resources and with constant updating. By being online and by being kept up to date, *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive* provides a new way to investigate, explore, record, and integrate ornithological information. One of the goals of the editors is to be able to reach, by nature of the site's low cost and universal availability online, a far larger population of interested readers.

The specific advantages provided by *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive* are many. The individual species accounts include information on taxonomy, distribution, identification, voice, habitat, food and feeding, breeding, movements, and status and conservation. Being an online resource, throughout the species accounts, readers can click on links to videos, sound recordings, photographs, and other multimedia resources that profoundly enrich the learning experience. Also, by being digital, this resource allows fluid interactive exploration through visual resources such as the Visual Family Index that permits browsing through avian taxonomy and offering links to in-depth informa-

tion on families, as well as the species in those families. *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive* provides up-to-date lists of references for each bird species. It also allows readers to add lists of their own personal bird sightings; to search by name, taxonomy, or geographic region; and to search for specific terms throughout the entire resource in seconds, something that would take months in the 13,367 pages of the text version. There is a section called Latest Ornithological News that lists recent developments. Content on *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive* also links with the information on the Internet Bird Collection (IBC) website (<http://ibc.lynxeds.com/>), a free online resource of bird photographs, videos, and sound recordings maintained by Lynx Edicions.

For anyone interested in birds, or vertebrate animals in general, *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive* will be immensely enjoyed, and will quickly become an invaluable and often-used resource.

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WELCOME TO SUBIRDIA: SHARING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS WITH WRENS, ROBINS, WOODPECKERS, AND OTHER WILDLIFE.

By John M. Marzluff; illustrated by Jack DeLap. *New Haven (Connecticut): Yale University Press.* \$30.00. xvi + 303 p.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-0-300-19707-5. 2014.



HUMAN BIOLOGY AND HEALTH

CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN AMERICA: BIOGRAPHY OF AN EPIDEMIC.

By Laura Dawes. *Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press.* \$45.00. ix + 305 p.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-0-674-28144-8. 2014.

As a freelance medical journalist, Laura Dawes tells the interesting history of childhood plumpness, which went from being admired as a sign of health in the 19th century to being a harbinger of adult obesity. This is as much a social and political history of obesity as it is the history of the biomedical understanding. There are support groups, such as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and Health at Every Size (HAES), which seek to build self-esteem and empowerment. Although sumo wrestlers can maintain good glucose-insulin regulation despite obesity, the physical activity required is not sustainable and diabetes sets in sooner than later. Given evidence that maternal obesity increases the risk for offspring, there is no quick

fix. The title phrase “*obesity in America*” may be a marketing strategy, but does not fairly present the global nature of the obesity epidemic as elaborated in the volume.

Childhood obesity seems as intractable as for adults, with about 30% of U.S. children afflicted. The history of childhood growth curves is nicely reviewed, beginning in mid-1800s with the growth curves of Adolphe Quetelet in Belgium, who introduced the concept of optimum body size with reference to the body mass index. Several decades later in Boston, Henry Bowditch further analyzed sex and ethnic differences in children’s growth, with assumptions that were in resonance with prevailing beliefs about racial superiority. Plumpness remained an ideal for a healthy child until the 1920s, when some pediatricians were becoming concerned about overweight patients. Subsequent interventions included psychoanalysis and pituitary extracts, equally futile. Readers seeking depth in the mechanisms leading to childhood obesity will enjoy Susan Prescott’s latest book, *Origins: Early-Life Solutions to the Modern Health Crisis* (2015. Crawley (Australia): UWA Publishing). I also note the excellent work of Kevin D. Hall at the National Institutes of Health, which has defined sex differences in growth trajectories to optimize the food intake needed to “outgrow” childhood obesity.

The book concludes on the politics of food production and food advertising in our “obesogenic environment” (p. 207). An enormous effort in public health is needed with a strategy over several future generations.

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NAVIGATING METABOLISM.

By Navdeep S. Chandel; illustrated by Pete Jeffs. *Cold Spring Harbor (New York): Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press.* \$79.00 (hardcover); \$49.00 (paper). xv + 248 p.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-1-62182-040-6 (hc); 978-1-62182-129-8 (pb). 2015.

Metabolism, according to Chandel, is a subject that is currently undergoing a renaissance, having nearly gone out of fashion in recent memory. For many students (as well as many seasoned investigators), the encounter with the complexities of metabolism, including multiple intermediates, enzymes, details of regulation, and interactions between pathways, can be quite daunting. Although many biochemistry textbooks cover this topic in varying levels of detail, their comprehensive coverage of the material does have a tendency to become descriptive without a narrative to tie together relationships among the various players.

This volume covers the impact of the metabolic pathways in 232 succinct pages, which include abundant illustrations. Organized into 12 chapters, it begins with a brief synopsis of the seminal