

## Reviews

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### **Birds of Shenandoah National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park – A Field Guide**

Ernest Preston Edwards. The McDonald and Woodward Publishing Company, Blacksburg, Virginia, 2006. Principal illustrator Edward Murrell Butler. Includes 336 species and color illustrations, 141 pages. 7 ½" by 4 ½". ISBN 0-939923-96-3. \$19.95.

The field guides most commonly used by birders today cover extensive areas and include hundreds of species. For experienced birders, who use field guides to identify birds they are less familiar with because they are uncommon or rare in their area, this type of field guide is ideal. But for less experienced birders, finding a species in a large guide can be difficult and time consuming, especially if the birder is relying mainly on color for identification as many beginning birders do. Because beginning birders are not practiced at using range maps, unlikely identifications can occur.

This book was designed to eliminate some of those errors by limiting the range covered and reducing the number of choices available. The small size also makes it very convenient for carrying in the field. The size of the book is accomplished by eliminating many eastern species that may occur in the mountain area rarely, accidentally, or never. This could also result in misidentifications in rare circumstances, but probably much less frequently than those that could occur as a result of an overabundance of choices. The book also lacks range maps, since the range it covers is limited. When species occur over only part of the entire range there are notations. A significant advantage of the limited range covered in this guide is that location descriptions include elevation, when significant, and habitats specific to the mountains. Maps of the three major areas are included with some major landmarks. Species are grouped into birds associated with water and land birds, with the land birds subdivided into various categories. Each group is easily located with convenient color-coded strips on the right side of the page.

Overall this is a handy little guide to carry into the field, since it is small enough to fit into a large pocket, but it does have some limitations. Some of the more vibrantly colored birds appear dull and dingy in the illustrations. Also, plates of some of the neotropical migrants only include adult birds in summer plumage, and most plates that do show winter or immature plumage show only the head of the bird. Since many migratory birds molt into winter plumage before the end of summer the inadequate coverage of primary plumage is a problem. Including written descriptions of winter plumage is helpful, but because most novice birders skim through guides just looking at the pictures, written descriptions probably aren't enough. Even with these limitations, though, this is a handy little starter guide for those living in or visiting the mountain region. — *Marilyn Westphal, Hendersonville, NC*