



12-31-2008

# *Introduction to California Birdlife* by Jules Evens and Ian Tait

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### Recommended Citation

White, Clayton M. (2008) "*Introduction to California Birdlife* by Jules Evens and Ian Tait," *Western North American Naturalist*: Vol. 68 : No. 4 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/wnan/vol68/iss4/15>

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Introduction to California Birdlife.** 2005. Jules Evens and Ian Tait. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA. \$16.95, paperback; 393 pages, 144 numbered plates (photographs by author), 12 maps, 3 tables, 2 figures. ISBN 978-0-520-24254-8.

This is a grand little book that should be of interest to anyone who fancies birds, whether in California or not. The varied topics are often of general interest and can be applied to a variety of regions. This is yet another book from the long series of California Natural History Guides. The format is a breakdown of the state of California into large sections that are ecogeographic in context. Titles to chapters include An Overview of California Birdlife, Seabirds and the Marine Environment, Birds of the Shoreline, Birds of the Coast Ranges, Birds of the Central Valley and Delta, Birds of Mountains and Foothills, Birds of the Great Basin, and The Desert Birds. These sections form about 73% of the book. The authors include a checklist, a glossary of terms, references, an index to birds, and a general index. The references, while not extensive, range from a publication in 1832 to one in 2004. Three references are undated.

Some of the diversity found in the book can be tasted by looking at topical matter in various chapters. In Chapter 1, which is a general overview of California's birds, a discussion of edges and ecotones indicates how artificial it often is to have sharp boundaries in a discussion of birds. Enclosed within that topic is a 2-page discussion of the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), its invasion into various parts of California, and the impact of this invasion on other birds; cowbirds have expanded in California, as elsewhere, in part because of ecotones. What follows is a discussion of superspecies, species, and subspecies. Working examples are the "breakups" of the

Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*), flycatchers (*Empidonax* spp.), towhees (*Pipilo* spp.), and so forth into more than 1 species. Chapter 2, which is on the marine environment, is particularly inviting because of the discussion about El Niño and the southern oscillation. The text then continues by dividing the birds into the recognized taxonomic orders for specific discussions and treatments. There is a good discussion of the biogeography of seabirds under the section heading *Northern vs. Southern Affinities*.

Scattered throughout the book are special "highlighted" sections on trips to various regions as recorded in field notes. Some of these sections deal with other topics like sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus* spp.) hybridization and the Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*), a species tottering on the brink of threatened status and whose populations primarily winter in California. The chapter on birds of the Great Basin features a lengthy discussion of the Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) within the context of decreasing sagesteppe habitat. This species, too, is declining, mainly because of habitat conversion, and will probably continue to do so in the future.

All in all, this is a book well worth having whether one lives in California, plans to travel to California, or simply wants a better understanding of the world of birds. Since I am accustomed to paying between \$60.00 and \$150.00 for books, this small guide comes at a very attractive and affordable price. I recommend it for public, university, and personal libraries.

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