



How to use this book

The information given in this book is intended to add to that already available in ordinary field guides to North American birds. A previous version of this book was written by Colin Harrison and was published in 1978; this current form of the book represents an expanded and more detailed improvement. It is intended to serve as a guide to the breeding biology of North American nesting birds. It covers the North American region from the Arctic to the southern boundary of the United States. The area includes Alaska, Canada, the contiguous United States and (in an exception to the usual treatment of North American avifauna) Greenland. We have followed in the main the 1983 American Ornithologists' Union Checklist and its recent taxonomic modifications.

The **Contents List** at the beginning gives a list of bird families and subsidiary groupings arranged in this sequence. The color plates of nestlings and of eggs are not necessarily in the exact same sequence. Though the names and taxonomic relations within each page of the plates are up-to-date, the order of the plates reflects the family order accepted when the first version of this book was written.

The **Introduction** gives the background necessary to use the information that occurs under each heading in the main text on any particular species. The sections deal with habitat and nest-site, nest, breeding season, eggs, incubation, nestlings, and the nestling period. Within the introduction each of these is treated in turn, giving the meaning of some of the terms used, and the general background of each section, including the scope and limitations of the information on each bird.

The information in the Introduction is intended to be read before the book is used, but the first immediately practical part is the section containing three **Identification Keys**: It is not possible, in the case of birds' nests, eggs, and young, to give keys which will enable the reader to identify rapidly a particular species unless the bird in question has well-marked peculiarities setting it apart from most others. It has, however, been possible to provide keys to nests, to eggs, and to young which may enable the user to narrow rapidly a meaningful search to a limited number of species, which he or she can then limit still further by reference to the plates and text. Since it is usually necessary to take a number of factors into consideration, cross-references to the other two keys are given in each key.

The **Main Text** is in the form of a systematic list. Each section begins with a general note on the family or species group, giving the general information common to the whole group of birds, and then each species is dealt with in turn, the available information being given in slightly abbreviated form. The families and groups may be traced from the index or the contents list at the beginning, while individual species can be traced from the indexes to common and scientific names at the end of the book.

The **Illustrations** consist of color plates and black-and-white drawings in the text. The *Nestling Plates* are grouped together between p. 222 and p. 223 and show young birds at the nestling stage. These plates usually show a view of young birds from the side. There is often a close similarity between the nestlings of related

species and, apart from some distinctly-patterned downy chicks, in most instances single typical examples representative of a small group of species are shown. Some black-and-white figures of *Down Patterns* of chicks, mostly seen from above, have been included in the text section. These supplement the color plates, and they assist in the identification of downy young which are more often observed from above as they attempt to hide by crouching. A few other, side-view, *Nestling Sketches* are also provided.

The *Egg Plates* are also in a section between p. 222 and p. 223, and they show examples of almost every species in the volume. A few are omitted – primarily rare species, some recent taxonomic splits, or species that breed on the extreme limits of the region covered. Eggs may vary and in most cases it has only been possible to show a single example, although in some instances more than one is included and may indicate the range of variation rather than the typical single example. In the other instances, however, the degree of variation is indicated on the caption pages and can be further checked with the text. The caption pages also give the general information on the eggs and nest-site for each group.

The color plates, used in conjunction with the keys and text, should make it possible to identify most eggs and young.

There are also black-and-white drawings distributed in the text serving as *Nest Illustrations*. They have been chosen to show the typical nests of the various groups of birds, and also the more striking and more readily identifiable of the exceptional nests which some birds make. It was not thought necessary to show nest structure normally concealed in cavities (with the exception of one example, that of Gila Woodpecker, Figure 70).