

BOOK REVIEW

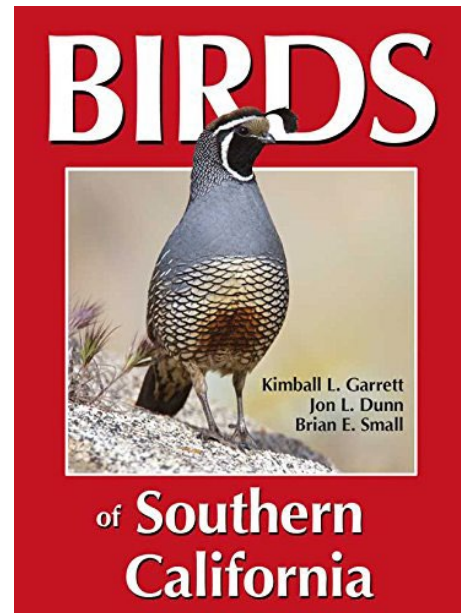
A SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD GUIDE ARIZONA BIRDERS WILL FIND USEFUL

BY DIANA HERRON

Birds of Southern California, by Kimball L. Garrett, Jon L. Dunn, and Brian E. Small. 2012. Published by R. W. Morse Company, Olympia, Washington. 506 pages. Paperback. \$24.95. ISBN 13: 9780964081086.

In addition to Rick Taylor's *Birds of Arizona*, there are several other field guides in the same format published by R. W. Morse and Company. Arizona birders should consider adding to their libraries one of these guides, the excellent publication *Birds of Southern California* (hereafter *BoSC*).

Why would Arizona birders be interested in adding *BoSC* to their library? First, southern California is due west of Arizona and is an easy day's drive for most Arizona birders. *BoSC* has excellent descriptions of the southern California specialties, such as California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*), and good information about where to find these specialty birds. Second, the descriptions of challenging birds, such as Empidonax flycatchers, are useful to all of us. For example, there are detailed descriptions of Willow (*Empidonax trailii*), Hammond's (*E. hammondii*), Dusky (*E. oberholseri*), Gray (*E. wrightii*), and Pacific-slope (*E. difficilis*) Flycatchers, along with useful tips about distinguishing these similar species. [In July 2023, the latter was again merged with Cordilleran Flycatcher (*E. occidentalis*) as one species—Western Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*)]



Kimball Garrett and Jon Dunn have outstanding credentials in the field of southern California birding. Their first book, *Birds of Southern California: Status and Distribution* (1981), has become a classic. It is a gold mine of information and is still relevant today. Jon Dunn has been a consultant and author of the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* from the first edition published in 1983 to the current seventh edition published in 2017. Brian Small is the son of Arnold Small who was a well-known photographer specializing in California bird photography. Brian is an excellent photographer in his own right.

BoSC is the same size and shape as *Birds of Arizona* and follows a similar organization. The choice of California Quail (*Callipepla californica*) for the cover is an excellent one, since this handsome bird is the state bird of California.

On the inside of the front cover a map shows key birding spots in southern California, as well as major cities. The coverage for this guide includes 10 counties: San Luis Obispo, Kern, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, and Imperial. Next comes a quick guide to local birds, then the title page and table of contents. Illustrations of common local birds precede the 22 pages of introductory material. Some of this introductory material is standard for field guides, such as the book's geographic coverage, a note on taxonomy, and illustrations of the parts of a bird. The most important part of the introduction is the section on bird habitats of southern California and their birds. Habitats range from coastal marine waters to the Salton Sea, with 11 habitats in

between. Users of the guide are well advised to study this section of the book. The introductory material concludes with a section on helpful resources.

The species account pages are organized in the R. W. Morse best-selling format: Description, Voice, Behavior, Similar Species, Where, When to Find, and Did You Know? The photographs, which are placed opposite the written material, are excellent and are another reason to have this book in your library. The photograph page might include images of an adult and juvenile of the same species, or sometimes images of similar species, such as Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) and Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*). *BoSC* lacks the excellent maps of the *Birds of Arizona*, and the reader must rely on the map on the inside cover or other sources to understand the distribution of each species. There is a place at the bottom of each species account for the reader to enter Date & Location Seen.

The first account deals with Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*), and the last account in the main section of the guide deals with Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*), formerly Nutmeg Mannikin. Following the Munia account are 3 special sections: Mountain Specialties, Desert and Salton Sea Specialties (most of which are familiar to Arizona birders), and Pelagic Species.

The final material in the guide includes acknowledgments, an index/checklist, author biographies, and a useful Short Index to Species.

I highly recommend that you refer to *BoSC* when trying to make a difficult identification of an Arizona bird and that you take *BoSC* on your next trip to southern California when you are searching for California Quail, California Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*), California Gnatcatcher, California Thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*), California Towhee (*Melospiza crissalis*), or even Wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata*).