

BOOK REVIEWS

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Bird Traditions of the Lime Village Area Dena'ina: Upper Stony River Ethno-ornithology. Priscilla N. Russell and George C. West, with editorial and linguistic commentary by James Kari; illustrations by George C. West. 2003. Alaska Native Knowledge Network, Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Pp. xx + 206. \$10.00 (paper). ISBN 1-877962-38-4.

Russell and West have compiled a sensitive and detailed account of the ornithological knowledge of the people of Lime Village, Native Alaskans who speak a dialect of Dena'ina Athabaskan. Though Lime Village is tiny—population 42 according to the 1990 census—the elders who provided the bulk of the information for this ethno-ornithology participate in a cultural and linguistic tradition that nearly spans the continent. The authors are careful to note that the knowledge in this local community is distinctive in many ways in that it reflects the particular experiences of Lime Villagers with the birds of their traditional homelands. On the other hand, James Kari's wide-ranging linguistic comparisons (Appendix B) hint at broader patterns, as for example, that the Lime Village name for the Sandhill Crane is cognate of the Navajo term for the same bird (p. 204).

Priscilla Russell has lived and worked with local Dena'ina peoples for over thirty years and has earned their trust. Her ethnographic summary covers the seasonal cycle, how children learn to identify and to hunt birds, harvest strategies, useful products of birds, birds as pets, and a brief account of Lime Villagers' beliefs about birds, with particular emphasis on attitudes of respect that inform people's interactions with birds. Sacred stories and details of local beliefs with respect to specific birds are treated in a later section devoted to individual species accounts. This section is largely the work of George West, an expert on Alaskan bird life with forty years' experience in that field. He is also an accomplished artist. His accurate pen-and-ink drawings illustrate every species known to occur in the immediate region.

West's species accounts reflect the latest word in scientific bird classification and nomenclature. He is careful to note which species are of regular occurrence in the Upper Stony River area and which are rare stragglers. This proves critical, as nearly all regularly occurring species have widely recognized Dena'ina names, while most rarities, while recognized, are not named. Though hardly surprising, this fact is important if we are to judge the accuracy of the local knowledge system. As Kari notes in his appendix (p. 203), Lime Villagers name 111 kinds of birds, representing 127 well-known species. They recognize but do not name an additional 18 rarities. This compares very favorably with the classic account by Jared Diamond (1966) of the ornithological nomenclature of the Fore people of the Papua New Guinea highlands. The "discrepancy" is due to the "lumping" of

closely related species, such as the scaups, goldeneyes, golden-plovers, yellowlegs, peeps, dowitchers, glaucous-winged and glaucous gulls, three-toed woodpeckers, creeper and nuthatch, and several predominantly yellow wood-warblers. As any birder will appreciate, the "failure" to distinguish these species is hardly surprising. What is surprising—to this reviewer, at least—is the subtlety of many of the distinctions that Lime Villagers recognize and the perspicacity of their behavioral and ecological observations.

For example, the woodpeckers are distinguished in terms of the trees they prefer: the downy woodpecker is the "shrub/willow woodpecker," the hairy woodpecker is the "alder" or "cottonwood woodpecker," while the three-toed and black-backed woodpeckers are "spruce woodpeckers." The northern flicker—a rather odd woodpecker—is classed with its fellows but bears a separate name, "nose-wedge," descriptive of its foraging propensities.

The woodpecker example hints at some very interesting taxonomic features of this Dena'ina system. It has been claimed that hunting-gathering peoples rarely employ binomial naming (Brown 1985:43–62); that their taxonomic trees are quite "shrubby," to borrow Robert Randall's phrase. Dena'ina employs binomials to recognize "specific contrast sets" ("secondary names," following Berlin 1992:28ff) not only for the several woodpecker species, but also in recognizing three swallow species (a fourth, the tree swallow, like the flicker, being the most distinctive member of the swallow folk generic, bears a "primary name"). The mergansers, "soaring hawks," ptarmigans and gulls are treated similarly.

Dena'ina ethno-ornithology is unique in the number of clearly named "intermediate" taxa (Berlin 1992:22ff). For example, geese are *ndatuxy*, a term used polysemously to name the Canada goose as well. However, the greater white-fronted and snow geese and the Brant have their own, quite distinctive names. Ducks are *jija*, but not one of the 16 kinds of ducks named incorporates *jija* in its name after the binomial fashion. Owls are treated likewise. Finally, small birds are grouped as "winter" and "summer [small] birds," reflecting an ecological rather than a morphological criterion. One last comment on the Dena'ina taxonomy: It seems to recognize a unique "mammal/bird" life-form, as the term *ggugga* "creature" appears restricted to warm-blooded vertebrates, a possibility not contemplated by Brown (Brown 1979) or Berlin.

As is frequently noted for birds, bird sounds play key roles in both naming and recognition. Local birds, of course, speak the local dialect, as in the case of the olive-sided flycatcher, which is named for its call, *waxa nihi*, which means, "the one that says 'dried fish'." The arrival of this bird signals the impending arrival of salmon on the Upper Stony River. Owls, as you might expect, often announce unpleasant events. If the great horned owl calls a person's name, the person will die. However, as the authors are careful to note, owls "do not cause misfortune but merely foretell its occurrence" (p. 100). Not all the news brought by owls is bad. The snowy owl is a sign of good fortune (p. 101) and if a boreal owl calls near a house, a member of that household should catch an animal the next day (p. 103).

Finally, I was struck by certain odd details of Dena'ina beliefs that have parallels in other cultures far removed. For example, chickadees are important out of proportion to either their size or any conceivable material utility they might pos-

sess. "If a person hears a chickadee when he is in the forest away from home, the person. . . will receive a visitor." I recorded precisely this belief for the Sahaptin Indians of Washington State (Hunn 1990:324), though the languages of the two groups are not at all closely related. Also, the Dena'ina, like people everywhere, would like to preserve their youth, in this case, keep their glossy black hair from turning gray. They believe that "if a young girl wears a raven-feather hat, the girl's hair will not turn gray. . ." (p. 143). In the same spirit, the Tzeltal Maya of southern Mexico apply raven's blood to their hair to prevent graying (Hunn 1977: 118).

In conclusion, this is a fascinating account of a highly sophisticated ethno-ornithological system that rewards close scrutiny.

Eugene S. Hunn
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Folk Mammalogy of the Northern Pimans. Amadeo M. Rea. 1998. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. Pp. xxiii + 286. \$45.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-8165-1663-4.

This is the third in a series presenting the results of over thirty years of ethnographic studies of Northern Piman ethnobiology by Dr. Amadeo Rea. *Once a River: Bird Life and Habitat Changes on the Middle Gila River* (1983) and *At the Desert's Green Edge: An Ethnobotany of the Gila River Pima* (1997) deal with birds and plants, respectively, but are more sharply focused on the Gila River Pima. The present volume brings together all available information for the entire Piman language area, north and south of the Mexican border.

Dr. Rea is by profession a museum ornithologist but by inspiration and personal inclination an accomplished and highly sympathetic ethnographer of Native American folk science. Like most ethnobiologists, he synthesizes a sophisticated understanding of and deep appreciation for both biological and cultural diversity and a concern that neither be lost beneath the heavy tread of progress. Dr. Rea offers this book as his return to his Native colleagues on the value of their gifts