

Publication of “Waterfowl of the World” by Gary Kramer — a lifetime achievement

Interviewed by John Takekawa and Phelan McKinney, SRCD

Gary Kramer’s recently released book entitled “*Waterfowl of the World*” represents a monumental accomplishment to capture images of all of the waterfowl in the world in their natural habitats with notes on their biology, distribution, and conservation status. A renowned waterfowl photographer and biologist, Gary began working on the project more than 4 years ago with assistance on the text from biologist Greg Mensik.

Raised in Los Angeles, Gary was a self-described “outdoorsy kid,” who read *Outdoor Life*, *Field and Stream* and hunted doves in the desert. He became interested in waterfowl conservation, and he completed undergrad and graduate degrees at Humboldt State University where he wrote a thesis on black brant migrating from Mexico. Gary graduated and began work as a waterfowl habitat manager at several wildlife areas in California, finishing a 26-year career with the USFWS as the project leader for Sacramento NWR Complex.

Starting in the 1970s, Gary began to write articles for magazines on the side, and he quickly learned that articles are more likely to be published if you provide good photographs to go with them. What started as a part-time hobby turned into a lifelong pastime. Gary has now published more than 1,000 articles and well over 20,000 photos in magazines as well as completing 7 books since retiring in 1999. He was named to the California Waterfowler’s Hall of Fame in 2011.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Gary became intrigued with the challenge of taking high resolution photos of every species of waterfowl in a natural setting, following up on the 1996 book “*Natural History of Waterfowl!*” by Frank Todd which was 25 years out-of-date and included many species photographed in captivity. Kramer was determined to do better, promising:

“I don’t want any photos of a scoter on a lawn”



Falcated Teal

All Photo Credit to Gary Kramer

Waterfowl of the World, Continued

Gary traveled to many countries on his hunting and fishing adventures, but to obtain high-resolution pictures to complete the book, he had to travel to over 40 countries in 3 years. Covid interrupted his plans during part of the project, but he still was able to photograph almost all of the 167 species and only missed 2 species.

One missing species was the Stejneger's scoter that was recently identified as a separate species from the White-winged scoter in 2019, but Covid travel restrictions prevented him from visiting its breeding or wintering areas. The other was Eaton's pintail, as his extensive efforts to obtain permits to travel to the remote French-governed islands where it is found were frustrated by local bureaucracy.

“If there were two things that made this book possible, it was digital photography and the internet [to arrange the travel]”

Remarkably, Gary was able to photograph 165 waterfowl including the Andaman teal with a population of 1,000 birds found only on the remote Andaman Islands; Salvadori's teal hidden in the rainforests of Papua New Guinea which required >60 hours sitting in blinds for 5 minutes of pictures; and the Madagascar pochard with only 74 known birds in the wild.

SRCD Operations Manager-Biologist, John Takekawa had the opportunity to travel with Gary on one of his trips in the winter of 2018 to find and obtain images of colorful Mandarin ducks swimming on urban streams under highways and skyscrapers of Seoul, South Korea. When we asked Gary about the experience of making the book, he said it was best described as “blind faith” in the project, and that he is still amazed that he got it done.

“The sites I traveled to were places that I had never been, with guides I had never met. I didn't know the weather or habitat going in”

How do I obtain the book?

Waterfowl of the World is a 540-page coffee table book (12" x 10 ¼") with 1,299 photographs and 167 range maps. It is available to order in California postpaid for \$106 (limited edition available for \$250) at <https://www.garykramer.net/waterfowl-of-the-world-standard-edition>.

All Photo Credit to Gary Kramer

