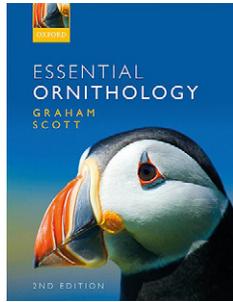


## ORNITHOLOGY

**Essential Ornithology. Second Edition**

By Graham Scott. 2020. Oxford University Press. 224 pages, 45.95 CAD, Cloth. Also available as an E-book.

Graham Scott's *Essential Ornithology* is designed as an introduction to the scientific study of birds. It delivers on this objective, covering the fundamental elements of bird life: evolution, feathers and flight, migration and navigation, eggs and nesting, reproduction, foraging, and populations.



The book is, on the whole, accessible to the amateur ornithologist. It is written in clear if sometimes scientific language, made more personable by anecdotes from the author. Moreover, it includes plentiful diagrams and colour pictures to support and complement the text. The geographic diversity of species used as evidence and examples means that any reader is likely to encounter familiar names.

One useful feature of the book is the inclusion of frequent boxes to explain important concepts, provide key citations, cross-reference other sections of the text, or dive deeper into particular areas. One such box (pp. 16–17) explains the ecological impact of hybridization. It recounts how the North American Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), upon its introduction to Europe, promptly interbred with the indigenous White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*). The genetic viability of the native species was threatened until concerted international conservation measures stemmed the Ruddy Duck's expansion. The box draws an analogy to the inverse case of American Black Ducks (*Anas rubripes*) and Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) in North America, where the spread of Mallards may have been supported by the introduction of European stock by early settlers. Although still quite common, Black Duck is now on a genetic precipice in its native range owing to interbreeding with the more dominant Mallard. Case studies such as

these help make the book interesting and intelligible to a diverse audience.

As an introduction, *Essential Ornithology* understandably leaves some intellectual avenues not fully pursued. One example is a discussion of feather pigmentation (p. 26), in which it is noted that red and yellow colours are solely acquired from diet. The author adds that these colours feature prominently in the breeding plumage of males, suggesting that this may be a signal of virility. The connection is left for the reader to make, that colours acquired through feeding indicate an ability to feed oneself—and therefore to feed a mate and young.

Yet these very implications and omissions also serve to underline just how much remains unknown in the avian world. The frequent references to limited data and outstanding questions should certainly intrigue and inspire anyone curious about the life of birds. The author draws on a wide body of literature from across many decades, including initial reports on ongoing research. Students and casual readers alike will find potential dissertations and investigations in these pages.

There was a small but surprising number of typographical and grammatical errors in the text. These did not interfere significantly with legibility but should have been caught in the review process. The graphs would also have benefited from greater editorial attention: while helpful overall, some are quite unintuitive, particularly for the non-scientist reader.

Regardless, there is a great deal of information collected here in a slender volume. To be at once introductory and scientific is not easy; for succeeding in this endeavour, *Essential Ornithology* deserves our interest and appreciation.

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