

# Book Reviews

## ZOOLOGY

### **Birds of Australia** (Seventh edition)

By Ken Simpson and Nicolas Day. 2004. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey, USA, 08540-5237. iv + 92 pages, U.S.\$39.50.

When Simpson and Day's first edition appeared (as *Birds of Australia*, later changed to *The Princeton Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*) it meant Australia had a bird guide that was equivalent to North America's National Geographic guide (Dunn 2002). It provided complete coverage of Australian birds in color, with accompanying text and range maps. Curiously the printing was, and still is, poorer than that of the National Geographic.

As with the original this book covers all six states (including Tasmania), three territories and 10 island territories. The new edition has a double page map of the continent, but does not show the island territories.

This revised edition has undergone significant changes from the original. Although much of the content is the same it has been reorganized. More important 19 of the plates have been repainted (actually I counted 24 plates with changes). The illustrations now include more plumage variations than before, such as female, juvenile, winter and different races. In addition to over 2000 colour images there are almost 1000 supplementary black-and-white drawings. One noticeable difference is that the illustration of the dead White-throated Needletail has been replaced with a represen-

tation of a live, flying one. Some extra space was generated on the main plates by moving the vagrants to a separate section. This is a better method of dealing with these rare birds.

The introductory material has been reorganized to give a more logical flow. Two small sections – on DNA and prehistoric birds – have been replaced by more pertinent material. All the range maps have been updated. The result is the book is slightly smaller than the original, so the book remains portable in the field.

Within the field information I noted only a few points I would question. The authors tend to lump species that more recently have been separated. These include the Royal and Macaroni Penguins, the Lesser and Greater Snow Petrels and the Yellow and Crimson Rosellas. The Paradise Parrot is still included, despite not having been seen since 1927.

This revised edition, with the original, simpler title of *Birds of Australia* and the expansion of information, makes this field guide a more useful book than the original.

#### **Reference**

<sup>1</sup>Dunn, Jon L. 2002. National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America: 4<sup>th</sup> edition Revised and Updated. National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.

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### **The Bird Almanac**

By David M. Bird. 2004 Key Porter Books Ltd. 70 The Esplanade, Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1R2 Canada. 460 pages, Can \$24.95 Paper.

Within this book is a massive amount of bird-related information! This review could actually end right here. However, I will elaborate somewhat.

Information in this book is presented in three ways: line drawings (restricted to the anatomy chapter), tables/lists as well as glossary-style entries. These are all appropriate and lead the reader to finding information rather quickly. There is both *birding* information and *ornithological* information (and a massive amount of overlap which is shared by both). A glossary of over 20 pages contains over 1000 terms – surely the word you're looking for must be there!

There are simply too many categories of information to give more than a smattering of examples here. Both traditional and genetically-based classifications of bird families are given, followed by the massive list of all

known bird species. Significant people are listed in several tables, ornithological award recipients, world-class listers, Taverner Cup winners, bird artists and more. Bird watching clubs, ornithological societies, magazines and journals are listed from sources around the planet.

To compare this book with Leahy's *The Birdwatcher's Companion*, a recent tome of similar intent, would be to have *The Bird Almanac* come on top. The former is essentially all in dictionary format, and therefore lacks the comparative ease (or the ease of comparisons) of the thematically-organized, tabular format in *Almanac*. There are more in-depth definitions and descriptions in *Companion* (it is also a much bigger book), and the bibliography is better-organized, but I believe birders will much more enjoy flipping through *Almanac*.

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