

bold as shown. The American bluebirds are a trifle too intense as are a few others, but most plates are accurate and certainly none would hinder identification.

Handbook of Birds of the World 10 adds another block of useful information to the world's ornithological literature for some of the world's most well known and loved birds. It is presented as readable text with

accurate and beautiful illustrations, complemented by excellent photographs. This is a mine of quality material that will be useful to many, especially the travelling birder – to be left at home as it is too large to pack.

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Handbook of the Birds of the World Volume 12

Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and David A. Christie. 2006. Lynx Edicions, Montseny, 8, 08193 Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain. 800 pages. 205 Euros. Cloth.

Kevin J. Caley is not a name that leaps into my mind when I think of paleontologists. He is the author of the foreword on fossil birds in this, the latest volume of *Handbook of Birds of the World*. He is an evolutionary biologist at the University of Nottingham, teaching various biodiversity-related subjects with a special interest in bird evolution and diversity. It was refreshing to read an article about the smaller dinosaurs and proto-birds rather than the giant flesh eaters. Caley has written and illustrated a comprehensive summary of the fossil record, covering 200 000 mya [million years ago] to 3000 mya. His illustrations are very helpful in following the evolution of species [although I question his relative size of his bald *Velociraptor* – about 7 m [43 ft.] compared to his *Tyrannosaurus*. This owes more to the film “Jurassic Park” than reality. [*Velociraptor* was turkey-sized 2 m and feathered]. The author includes a map of all major fossil sites [not bird fossil sites]. Both Alberta and Mongolia are missing. Similarly paleontologists like Phil Currie, Dale Russell, and Dong Zhiming are missing from his references.

This edition goes from Picathartes to Tits and Chickadees and includes Babblers, Parrotbills, Australasian Babblers, Logrunners, Jewel-babblers, Whistlers, Australasian Robins, Fairywrens, Bristlebirds, Thornbills, Australian Chats, Sittellas and Australasian Treecreepers. It covers a total of 638 species, a large proportion of which are Australasian. As in previous volumes, there is an introduction to each family covering systematics, morphology, habitat, behavior, voice, food, breeding, movements, relationship with man, and status and conservation. Each species account includes all the pertinent information about the biology of the bird. I checked through a host of species and found the taxonomic status is current, even if I get confused by the constant changes. I find it hard to reconcile the 59 subspecies of the Golden Whistler with the less-variable Blue Tit that has been split from the Canary Blue Tit. I also believe the distributions are accurate and the illustrations are correct. They cover every species and the more distinctive subspecies. I particularly noted how precise the Tawny-bellied Babbler – a recent life bird – illustration represented the birds I saw.

Considering there are 12 ornithologists who contributed to this volume, the quality of the accounts is both high and even. This is a credit to both the authors and editors and speaks volumes about their editorial discipline. There are 400 colour photographs, which range from good to spectacular. Again this is a reflection of the professional work done by the editors. For me, several photographs have a special appeal. The photograph of Great Tits [page 669] on a branch with catkins is given extra charm by the close match of the catkin colour to the yellow breasts of the birds. The photo of the Red-tailed Laughing Thrush [page 97] is not only a superb photo, but the birds themselves are very vibrant. Several other photographs also caught my attention [Splendid Fairy Wren [page 503], Varied Sitella [page 639], and Crested Tit [page 666]. The one that really grabbed me, though, is the photo of a Black-capped Chickadee hovering below a long icicle drinking. It took me a few moments to realise just what I was looking at, but when I clued in I was stunned.

I often wonder how prohibitive the cost of 205 Euros [about \$300 CAD] for each volume and about 2000 euros [almost \$3000 CAD] if you buy all 12 volumes. Remember there are more to come. For this money you could purchase 60 to 100 books on individual families. You would need to buy that many books to reference all of the families covered to date. For non-academic readers, the price of a volume may appear steep. However, it is reasonable when compared to the large number of other books you would have to buy to get the same coverage.

I have heard criticism about the brevity of the index – 17 pages for a book of 798 pages or 2%. I do not consider this out of line with similar books. While this might be an issue for academic researchers and possibly graduate students, for most of us the index is fine. While it is not detailed on technical terms, it does list all the species. I do not look for explanations of neontology [I would choose a more appropriate text]. I do expect to find the current known range of the Southern Emu-wren – and this index works well.

So once again Lynx have provided an impressive resource which will allow the enthusiast to go back frequently for much needed information on species splits and distribution.

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