

Book Reviews

ZOOLOGY

Birds of Chile

By Alvaro Jaramillo (Illustrated by Peter Burke and David Beadle). 2003. Princeton University Press. 288 pages. U.S. \$29.95 Paper, U.S. \$55.00 Cloth.

I had several surprises when I began reading *Birds of Chile*. First, the author, Alvaro Jaramillo, was born in Chile, but raised in Canada. The two artists, Peter Burke and David Beadle, are Canadians. So this book is really a Canadian endeavour. The book, as might be expected from the title, covers “all” the birds of Chile (including Easter Island and the section of the Antarctic Peninsular claimed by Chile – and disputed by Britain and Argentina). It also covers the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. The author has his logic for this extension into British (and international) territories. This is not the first Chilean field guide as has been claimed: I know of two English and one Spanish language books.

The book covers 473 species, including 9 endemics. The first question I asked was, is this an accurate coverage? My research found there was no simple answer. I verified that the book did cover 473 species, but this included about 20 species (like Snow Petrel and Emperor Penguin) that are confined to the Antarctic regions and have never occurred in Chile proper. The actual number of species seen in Chile is variously report between 473 and 487 (sometimes 549 is used, however this includes all the subspecies) and the number of endemics is between 9 and 14. My own list is 483 with 14 endemics. The text identifies 9 endemics, not including the Juan Fernandez Firecrown. The problem with the Firecrown entry is that a large chunk of text is missing (due to bad typesetting) and the word endemic is part of the missing text. This would make the endemics list for this book equal 10. I suspect the authors probably did their count electronically for the word “endemic”, which would account for their error. More surprisingly, they have not included species like the Juan Fernandez Petrel that nests only on Chile’s Alexander Selkirk Island. If they included these island-nesting seabirds the endemic total would reach 14.

Because Chile is a long, narrow country, the author decided to chop the range maps into three and place each part side by side. This novel treatment creates a rectangular map that fits better with the text. While I thought the map innovation was a neat idea it did give some problems. The author’s first use of this map format was in a useful section on the eco-geography. A version of the triple-section map has been colour coded

to depict the major vegetation zones. The first section, which appears to go from the northern border with Peru to Coquimbo, is shown as total desert backed by high Andean steppe. This is the Atacama Desert and it is the driest part of the world. But it does not correlate with some of the bird distributions. The ranges of several water birds (grebes, duck, herons, etc.) are shown as occupying this desert (in the rivers and along the coast). The second section, which overlaps the first slightly, shows sclerophyllous (Mediterranean-type) forest at the north end (i.e. the south end of the first section). Not only is this incompatible but I think something is amiss with the extent of the colour coding for the desert section. I have been unable to find another eco-zone map for comparison. I also had problems mentally re-aligning the three map sections into one continuous strip. Eventually I photocopied the map and cut and pasted it back into normal format. This helped, but I realized a regular Chilean map is essential to align with the place names given in the text.

When describing the distribution and occurrence of species the author is too generic with those birds that occur in the “peripheral” territories off the Chilean mainland. For example, the Emperor Penguin is rarely seen north of 60° (which includes the “Chilean” section of the Antarctic Peninsular) and this is not clear. Similarly, the Black-faced Finch is rare in Patagonia, but is easily found in the Falklands. This too is not stated.

Having found some problem areas, I hasten to add that this is a very good book for its main purpose. It has good quality, well-organised text accompanied by first-rate artwork. It covers most, if not all of the birds found in Chile. The treatment of species, including new splits, is sane and logical. The book is easy to use and small enough for a back pack (at 21 × 15 cm or about 8 × 6” it does not fit pockets well.) The illustrations cover flying, standing, male, female, juvenile and so forth as appropriate. Given the excellent quality of this artwork the user should have little problem using it in the field. A couple of my plates are rather dark (a problem with quality control of the printing process), but this should not impede their use. I think this book will sell well and this should lead to a second, revised printing.

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