

Gull is not an African endemic, and the Australian Ibis is not conspecific with the Sacred Ibis.

For me this book has some rather irritating problems that in sum seriously detract from its interest. Overall there is a lack of cohesion, mainly resulting from the organization of the text. The arbitrary chapter groupings inevitably run into families that do not quite fit the category, or fit into more than one. I would be inclined to place gulls and terns in the coastal waterbird chapter, lots of the "Seed-eaters" are classic LBJ's, and "Terrestrial Birds" results in a strange collection of species with Pittas following Ostrich. This is accentuated by the layout within the chapters, with (for example) "Avocets and Stilts" at the beginning of Chapter 3, "Oystercatchers" and "Plovers and lapwings" in the middle separated by Pelicans, and the "Waders or shorebirds" at the end. True, the systematic list at the end is in order, but this does little to balance the sense of randomness that one gets from the text itself.

Probably the authors would point out approaches of this kind are not unusual for books of the genre: they are not, after all, basic reference texts. Unfortunately, attractive though the layout is, there are problems with the plates as well. In many cases the tinier

illustrations are difficult to see properly, many of the poses are poor, and the selection of subjects pictured leaves something to be desired. Opening the book at random I find pp. 130-1 show two different pictures of Arrow-marked Babblers, one of the Southern Pied Babbler, and one of a Wallcreeper. The latter only occurs as a vagrant in North Africa, and the plate shows little of this species' remarkable wing pattern, so it simply looks like a gray bird. Africa does have a creeper species, and the text on these pages also includes the broadbills (Eurylaimidae). These species are not illustrated at all.

In summary, this book brings together a large number of photographs of African birds, some of them very good, together with a compilation of interesting facts and anecdotes on African bird families. My quarrels with content are really irrelevant if this is all you are looking for, or if you find this book attractive enough in itself to buy. Those who desire a thorough overview of the African avifauna should look elsewhere.

CLIVE E. GOODWIN

1 Queen Street, Suite 405, Cobourg, Ontario K9A 1M8
Canada

The Firefly Encyclopedia of Birds

Edited by Christopher Perrins. 2003. Firefly Books Ltd., 3680 Victoria Park Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M2H 3K1 Canada. 656 pages. U.S.\$59.95.

Naturalists across the continent strive to ever increase their knowledge of local wildlife, and all love to hear about wildlife from other localities. Birdwatchers, for example, can become very knowledgeable about their local species, and the zealous ones will even study species from other areas within the same country, continent or even from around the world. But the vast array of bird species is overwhelming, and it takes a serious encyclopedia to pull them all together. Luckily for us, *The Firefly Encyclopedia of Birds* edited by Christopher Perrins is just what we needed – a good collection of text and photos of the birds of the world all in one volume. Nicely presented with tons of sharp photos illustrating everything from specific behaviours to simply jaw-dropping "coolness" (including several underwater pictures such as common murres on page 280-281, common kingfisher on page 368, and American dipper on page 521), the book is backed up by solid text summarizing well the basic tenets of ornithology. Moreover, each chapter

focuses on a bird family (the large number of species precludes a species-by-species analysis), and is accompanied by a "factfile". This sidebar summary provides a general description of size and habits, as well as a broad distribution map and my favorite, a visual comparison of bird size to a human.

The book also details several interesting specific behaviors, such as pigeon homing (pages 294-295), or the nest parasitism of Cuckoos (pages 316-317), but nothing on the degradation of the tundra by Snow Geese, a topic of high importance and actuality in North America. It also discusses extinct birds such as the Elephant Bird (page 21), the Dodo (page 291), and a short paragraph on the Passenger Pigeon (page 293). The book provides a fantastic introduction to birds from all around the world, is extremely well presented, very reasonably priced (\$75.00 CAN, hardbound), and constitutes a worthy, if not essential, addition to the library of all bird enthusiasts.

SERGE LARIVIÈRE

226 Rang Bois-Joly, St-Apollinaire, Québec G0S 2E0, Canada