

**THE BIRDLIFE OF ROTTNEST ISLAND,**  
By D.A. Saunders and C.P. de Rebeira, illustrated by C.P. de Rebeira, published by DAS and CPdeR; Guilford, Western Australia, 1985. 13 plates pp 101. Price \$9.50.

At first glance one might jump to the conclusion that this book is merely an annotated list of the birds occurring on Rottneest Island (18 km from Fremantle off the coast of Western Australia) and therefore of interest only to the brochure hungry, passing tourist. However such is definitely not the case. While there may not be a large market for this book outside of those visiting or intending to visit the island, this highly informative book should stand as an example of how interesting and easily digestible information can be provided for the average person in order to enhance their appreciation of the natural environment.

As the authors point out in their introduction, the island is small (1900 ha) but very accessible, and visited by large numbers of

people (250,000 per year). These people are more likely than usual to see and take notice of birds, as legs and bicycles are the principal form of transport on the island. Thus the book sets out to show anyone not familiar with the identification of birds how to pick out the common birds of the island and find out something about their habits. This very worthwhile objective has been accomplished.

The six major bird habitats on the island are described and the descriptions include background on how the habitats have been changed by man and the subtle aspects that affect the manner in which birds utilise them. The 49 species that regularly occur on Rottneest Island are dealt with individually with the species accounts being grouped according to the habitat in which they occur. Each account includes identification points and a section headed "Status" which presents a large amount of information on all aspects of the bird's biology. These sections make fascinating reading as they are crammed with interesting

titbits on many subjects such as behaviour, diet, and population biology, drawn from the authors' own observations and from previous research studies. For example, to my great surprise I read that while the Whimbrel's *Numenius phaeopus* diet in Australia "includes molluscs, crustaceans, worms, beetles, flies, moths and spiders", in "Siberia they feed almost exclusively on berries,". These accounts are worth reading even if you are not intending to visit Rottnest Island. There is a good coloured illustration of each species and several photographs of habitat. A list of all birds which

occur on Rottnest Island including vagrants is given in an Appendix; 116 in all.

The book is rounded off with a section giving advice on planning bird-watching outings, a good bibliography and several maps of the island.

This book was specifically written to inform and stimulate and I'm sure the authors have done an excellent job in this respect. In doing so they have done all of us a service by promoting an awareness of the environment that can only help to safeguard it in the long term.

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