

## BOOK REVIEW

**THE BEST OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS** by Dave Watts. New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd, 1999. 128 pages, \$25.95rrp.

Wildlife photographer and author Dave Watts is somewhat the flavour of the month as the September 1999 issue of *Wingspan* (the quarterly magazine of Birds Australia) contains no less than ten of his superb photographs of birds illustrating features in a number of articles. Thus I knew that I was in for a treat as well as an education when asked to review his book *The Best of Australian Birds* to be released in September 1999.

Although it might be regarded by some as another coffee table book, it contains much useful information, particularly with regard to the location of species both on the mainland, and islands and reefs around Australia.

He has divided the text logically into five chapters according to major habitats with an introductory page to each and provided an index of the birds it contains.

The text and captions are clear and easy to read, the layout follows standard format in a book of this type and the coloured illustrations are of first class quality throughout, some breathtakingly beautiful! I liked particularly the tonal colours portrayed by the Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* and Australian King-Parrots *Alisterus scapularis* on page 65 and the clarity of detail in the Beautiful Firetail *Stagonopleura bella* displayed on page 108.

Having decided on only a few more than 170 of the total Australian species the author's "best" had to be selected by personal preference, perhaps aided by opinions of colleagues and friends. However might it not have been better

to reduce the number of multiple shots of the same species thus allowing space for a few additional ones? I wonder when he visited and photographed on Dirk Hartog Island if he managed to snap the black race of the White-winged Fairy-Wren *Malurus leucopterus*, whose inclusion would have been a distinct bonus.

While in this critical mood mention will be made of minor difficulties and errors encountered during the review. Some annoyance was caused trying to identify unnumbered pages. Although acknowledged on the dust cover as the first person to photograph the Orange-bellied Parrot *Neophema chrysogaster* on the nest in the wild, it is ironic that his main photograph of this bird appears on page 72 rather than 74 as indexed. The Cape Barren Geese *Cereopsis novaehollandiae* shown on page 56 and opposite are not mentioned in the index. The photograph of Little Penguins *Eudyptula minor* on page 61 does not appear in the appropriate list and the Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus* should be listed as page 113 instead of 115.

This book was not written to be a field guide to Australian birds but rather to encourage the reader to visit our diverse habitats; to see birds in their own surroundings and hopefully enjoy their beauty and variety.

If you think that the retail price of this hard-cover book is a bit steep at \$25.95, might I remind you that many of the paperbacks reviewed in the daily press are of similar price (or more) but lack its factual information and visual impact.

It should appeal to both the average bird-watcher as well as the general reader; so get hold of a copy, relax with it and enjoy all it has to offer.

ROSS REID