

BOOK REVIEWS

FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF AUSTRALIA by Ken Simpson, Nicholas Day and Peter Trusler. Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1999 (6th edition). 439 pages, \$35rrp.

A welcome new publication late in 1999 has been the 6th edition of this classic field guide to identification of Australian birds. The last edition came out in 1996, and this one, with major revisions, must claim our attention if we are serious about keeping up to date with changes to classification and the latest information available about the status and distribution of Australian birds. The authors claim a 'quantum leap' between 5th and 6th editions of the guide, based on the extensive revisions made.

Importantly, according to the publishers, this is the only current book to adopt recent changes to CSIRO classification guidelines (Schodde and Mason 1997, 1999)¹. Other changes include many improvements and additions to the illustrations. Fifteen older colour plates have

been replaced; many line drawings have been re-done, often with modifications and 94 new ones are included. The authors claim to have rewritten or modified the field information text for all species in the book.

Perhaps the most significant changes to note however are the updating of the distribution maps, making this guide in the authors' own words, 'The most sophisticated set of distribution maps ever published in an Australian field guide.' These have been prepared with the benefit of recently published CSIRO research, particularly on the current status of songbirds or perching birds (Schodde and Mason 1999).

The inclusion of the Handbook at the end of the identification section makes this much more than just a field guide. As the authors note, their aim is for the book to be a prime teaching and learning reference aid. The Handbook has been extended by 32 pages and contains new sections

¹ See the review of Schodde and Mason (1999) on pp. 88-90 and the note on taxonomy on p. 90—Eds.