

***FIELD GUIDE TO TASMANIAN BIRDS*** by Dave Watts, New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd, 1999. 192 pages, \$29.95rrp.

There is in my library of birds a small book which today would be identified as a paperback field guide, titled *Tasmanian Birds*, written by Michael Sharland and published in 1945. On its explanatory page were listed 14 endemic birds of the island. It contained descriptive features of the other birds which inhabited the land mass, adjacent islands and the surrounding oceans. Although with the passage of time, changes in taxonomic classification and the number of endemics shrinking to 12, the basic information remains valid and the book has served the bird watcher well enough over the succeeding 50 years.

However another contender for the prime position of field guide for Tasmania has appeared recently, authored by Dave Watts and called a *Field guide to Tasmanian birds*. It consists of seven main chapters, colour coded for identification, plus a bibliography and a checklist. The checklist is composed of both the accepted English and scientific name and an index. A page is devoted to each bird numbering 178 species, the top half dealing with the method of identification, habits, voice, habitation, breeding details, distribution and finally where best to find it. Incidentally there is a small distribution

map in the top corner of each page. The bottom half of each page is occupied by one of Dave Watts' beautifully crafted photographs exhibiting a bird's colour and form to perfection, which is his trade mark.

One can argue about the amount of factual information which should be included in a field guide. For example Simpson and Day's *Field guide to the birds of Australia* is almost encyclopaedic, with the handbook section comprising 180 pages and adding to the bulk and weight which have to be carried somehow! Dave Watts' book is more concise and could be subtitled a photographic guide as Sally Bryant indeed calls it in her excellent introduction, which is heartily recommended to the reader.

This guide will prove easy to use once the colour coding has been married in the mind to the appropriate bird group. I like the hints about where to find each bird but as such it might have been better to have included a full page map of Tasmania, which identified the major islands, national parks and towns particularly mentioned in the 'where to see' component—important for the visiting birdwatcher.

I would certainly use this as a companion to Sharland's book on any further visit to Tasmania, especially relating to visual identification, as the latter guide contains only 10 illustrations which bear no relationship to the text.

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