

Book Reviews

Seabirds: the New Identification Guide

PETER HARRISON, MARTIN PERROW and HANS LARSSON, 2021

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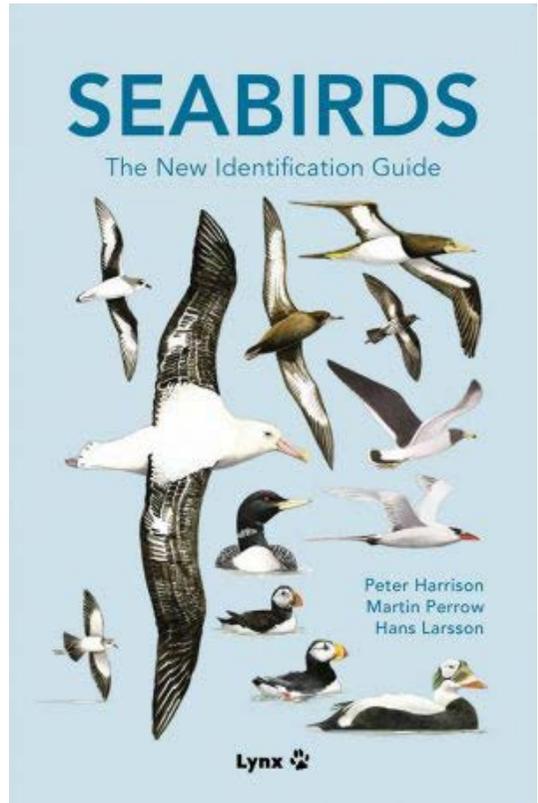
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Those who remember *Harrison's Seabirds: an Identification Guide* (Harrison 1983) will not be disappointed by this entirely new version. The old version was a *tour de force* produced by Peter Harrison alone but in this new version he is joined by another author, Martin Perrow, and another artist Hans Larsson. These three (described as HPL hereafter) have produced an exceptional trove of information with a global coverage too vast to cover here. To convey the comprehensive nature of the book this reviewer will focus on some of the seabirds seen off South Australia.

The book is based on the latest research at the date of publication incorporating or referencing the many taxonomic changes and discoveries that have occurred since 1983. As noted in the text, much seabird taxonomy is still in a state of flux, but it is not discussed in detail in the book, which focuses on identification. The layout is excellent and introduces each family with a general background before species accounts are presented. Each species, either singly or with a maximum of three in the case of smaller species, is then presented as a plate consisting of a page of text dealing with identification issues, a distribution map usually taken from del Hoyo and Collar (2014), and a facing page that contains the colour plate highlighting key identification features. The colour plates are annotated with additional identification information.



HPL illustrate seven species of great albatross, ten species of mollymawk and the two *Phoebetria* albatross, Sooty *P. fusca* and Light-mantled *P. palpebrata*. The Northern and Southern Royal Albatross and their identification will be familiar to South Australian seabirders as will some of those in the Wandering Albatross complex. The five species in the Wandering complex considered by HPL are superficially similar and they warn that identification remains challenging even for experienced observers, largely because the birds exhibit sexual dimorphism: males have larger bills and attain whiter plumage than

females. In addition, those breeding at southern latitudes show whiter plumage than those from northern latitudes. This poses problems for differentiating older females from younger males of different species as both bill size and plumage features then overlap.

With that caveat in mind HPL provide useful information for distinguishing between the New Zealand (NZ) species, Antipodean Albatross *Diomedea antipodensis* and Gibson's Albatross *D. gibsoni*, and for distinguishing both from Wandering Albatross *D. exulans*. That is also true of the other two species, Tristan Albatross *D. dabbenena* and Amsterdam Albatross *D. amsterdamensis* and, although these two species have not been visually recorded in SA waters, Amsterdam Albatross has been seen off WA and both have been satellite tracked to positions off Eyre Peninsula and may turn up further east in SA waters. The description of older adult males by HPL will prove particularly useful as the two southern breeders, *D. exulans* and *D. gibsoni*, can be difficult to separate except on size when seen together. Although both NZ taxa are illustrated in plate 133, HPL treat *gibsoni* as a smaller eastern form or race of *exulans*, *D. e. gibsoni* and give *D. antipodensis* full species status. By comparison, Menkhurst *et al.* (2017: 40–41) combine the two NZ albatross under NZ Wandering Albatross, *D. antipodensis* and treat Gibson's as a subspecies of *antipodensis*, *D. a. gibsoni*. These differences reflect the current state of flux in taxonomy.

Of the ten mollymawk species covered by HPL only one, the Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche eremita*, has not been recorded in SA waters. All the others have now been recorded and HPL add to the challenge by treating Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta* and White-capped Albatross *Thalassarche steadi* as separate species. However, they warn that identification of the two species away from the breeding grounds is '...difficult to impossible except for adults and older immatures in optimal conditions.' SA seabirders will no doubt take up the challenge.

Prions are a challenge even under ideal conditions, largely because of the degree of overlap in bill size and facial markings. On that score HPL make some progress in drawing attention to the differences between different breeding populations. For example, the populations of Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata* differ in appearance systematically across the Indian, Atlantic and Antarctic Oceans and these differences are illustrated in Plate 163. Knowledge of this diversity within species is obviously useful in limiting misidentification in this difficult group, particularly where clinal variation is present. In that respect, HPL advise that separation between Salvin's and Antarctic Prion may not always be possible because of 'the clinal variation in the virtually circumpolar Antarctic Prion, previously split into three (up to 6) "subspecies" according to locality: *desolata* (Kerguelen Is), *banksi* (Scotia Arc) and *alter* (NZ)'. These populations show variation in bill size that at the extremes makes some narrow-billed Antarctic Prions difficult to separate from some Slender-billed Prions *P. belcheri* (see Menkhurst *et al.* 2017: 53–56) or broader-billed individuals from *salvini* as noted above. Similar challenges apply to other pairs causing confusion such as Broad-billed and MacGillivray's or Fairy and Fulmar Prions.

In addition to these two challenging groups, HPL also cover the storm petrels, petrels, shearwaters, diving petrels, terns, gulls, skuas, gannets, penguins, pelicans and cormorants that might be seen along the SA coastline. In that respect the coverage is far more extensive than presented by Howell and Zufelt (2019) who deal only with oceanic or pelagic birds. HPL also cover sea ducks, phalaropes and grebes although some of the latter are seldom, if ever, seen on the ocean. In addition, HPL do not follow Howell and Zufelt in all taxonomy. For example, they do not give all the four races of White-faced Storm Petrel *Peglaodroma marina* species status, thereby avoiding the banal name Australian Storm Petrel for the locally breeding race of White-faced Storm Petrel (Howell and Zufelt 2019: 266). They

do, however, fall into that trap with the Gull-billed Tern, giving the Australasian race species status with the name Australian Tern *Gelochelidon macrotarsa*. This differs from the Menkhorst *et al.* (2017: 107) taxonomy that retains within *G. nilotica* the two races of Gull-billed Tern that occur in Australia (*G. n. macrotarsa* and *G. n. affinis*). This case illustrates the confusion that can occur in the allocation of common and scientific names because of uncoordinated revisions to existing taxonomy.

The HPL treatment of penguins that occur, or might occur, as vagrants on the SA coast is also interesting as they show three species of Rockhopper Penguin, Southern *Eudyptes chrysocome*, Northern *E. moseleyi*, and Eastern *E. filholi*. Identification of adults poses little difficulty but juveniles and immatures of Southern and Northern Rockhopper, the age most likely to come ashore along the SA coast, are difficult to distinguish from immature Fiordland Penguin *E. pachyrhynchus* that is a more regular visitor. All fledge with similar plumage and take three to four years to acquire adult plumage. However, the under-flipper patterns can be very useful for identification and are illustrated in the colour plates 124 and 126 and discussed in detail with reference to Figure 7 (HPL: 293).

HPL also distinguish the species Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* from Subantarctic Shearwater *Puffinus elegans* and include the now generally accepted distinction between Grey-faced *Pterodroma gouldi* and Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*. The taxonomy of the Little Shearwater is in a state of flux and HPL note that in addition to *assimilis* the races *tunneyi*, *kermadecensis* and *haurakiensis* all appear to be divergent, so may be given species status in the future. The Subantarctic Shearwater *P. elegans* has been recorded infrequently in SA waters (there are also some specimens in the SA Museum) but is difficult to photograph given its very rapid flight and disinterest in boats or berley. Similar observations apply to the Diving

Petrels, Common *Pelacanooides urinatrix* and South Georgian *P. georgicus* (there is a specimen of the latter in the SA Museum) but HPL note the recent discovery of a form of South Georgian Diving Petrel, Whenua Hou Diving Petrel *P. whenuahouensis*, in a small relict population on Codfish Island off South Island, NZ. There are also possibilities that cryptic species may be found in the large population of Common Diving Petrels spread across the southern latitudes.

The above discussion is restricted to some species that are or might be encountered in SA waters so cannot do justice to the comprehensive global coverage presented by HPL. In that respect, the attention to detail is exceptional and, even for someone who has seen many of the species illustrated, there was still a lot of new information in this guide. Although a guide on seabirds of the world can never be the last word, and HPL stress there is still much to learn, they make an important contribution. Seabirders everywhere will find the new identification guide an invaluable resource.

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Colin Rogers