

## BOOK REVIEW

### **FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF AUSTRALIA**

*By Ken Simpson and Nicholas Day, with Peter Trusler. Penguin Books Australia, 1996. Fifth edition. 400 pages, 130 colour plates. Price: \$35.00.*

In recent years there has been a trend for small cars to get larger and heavier in successive models. Fortunately this has not happened to the 5th edition of Simpson and Day's *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, which scores only eight more pages than the 4th edition. However it weighs 60% more, and is bulkier, than its main competitors!

The format still consists of three parts, viz. the Key to Families, Field Information section and the Handbook. The introduction tells of 19 replaced colour plates and there is an additional advantage of better correspondence between text and the appropriate coloured illustration. Personally I would prefer the bird's common English name alongside its own illustration to facilitate identification. The coloured plates retain their famous clarity and intensity, so necessary for identification and comparison, while the pale blue background to the distribution maps helps quicker range recognition.

The text of the field characteristics is certainly adequate but I think the information on nests and eggs would be better placed with the specific description rather than having to search for it in the Handbook.

I did not examine this edition specifically looking for errors/omissions, but I noted that an absence of size and measurements for the Sharp-tailed, Pectoral and Cox's Sandpiper in the 4th edition persists in the latest.

It is good to see that scientific information gained from molecular biology (DNA comparisons, DNA hybridization techniques and other studies) is included and is helping with evolutionary relationships, e.g. plains-wanderer with waders, and pratincoles with terns. Those of you who have an older edition may find the changed order in the field information section a bit of a nuisance but perhaps less than when we, with our established ideas of mensuration and currency, had to adapt to metrication.

The checklist of birds of the Australian Island Territories can be invaluable, as I found on a recent visit to Norfolk Island.

As a casual watcher of birds, I find the 5th edition an improvement on its predecessors. The basic information necessary for the novice and the average bird watcher is there and will allow the learning of field identification and aid in species distinction, which is the primary intention. The added bonus of references for additional reading is no doubt there for those who may wish to broaden their ornithological base. Despite the few personal criticisms, the new edition can be highly recommended.

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