

## BOOK REVIEW

*ADELAIDE'S BIRDS* by Hilary Thompson, illustrated by Judi Francis. *Shag on a Rock, Adelaide, 1997. 78 pages, A4, 16 coloured plates, black & white illustrations. SAOA members \$20 + \$3 p&h. P.O. Box 130, Blackwood, S.A. 5051; ph. 08 8278 8085.*

From its friendly beginning with "Please Start Here" and amusing acknowledgements, *Adelaide's Birds* has a comfortable tone that will encourage readers of all kinds to delve into its pages.

Hilary Thompson takes time to point out that he has not taken a purely scientific approach, but rather, a personal, subjective one. Thus he has drawn together information on bird's habits and appearance, and anecdotal and historical material, in a manner that he hopes will prove interesting for a range of readers including young, novice and experienced bird watchers.

Despite the subjective approach the book is very methodical in its arrangement. Pages 2-11 acquaint the reader with how to use the book and some basic birding concepts such as the nature of habitat, habitat change, how to attract birds to your garden, and introduced birds.

A map on p. 12 makes it clear that the author's definition of the Adelaide region is broad, reaching from Old Noarlunga in the south, including the Mt Lofty Range area from Kangarilla through Bridgewater, Uraidla, Black Hill to the Little Para Reservoir, and covering the metropolitan area north to Smithfield. Consequently there is a huge range of bird species occurring in the area which could be included in the book.

Thereafter follows text on 112 species found in this region, interspersed with colour plates and black and white illustrations. A comprehensive reference list and index concludes the book.

The species texts are arranged in taxonomic order and each family grouping is prefaced by

excellent summaries of familial distribution, general appearance and behavioural characteristics. These texts make very easy reading and are full of interesting historical and behavioural information, sometimes even including protracted discussion of common name histories. They summarise places in Adelaide where the birds can be seen and various aspects of their life histories. An account of similar species is included, and valuable references conclude each species description. The texts are backed by Judi Francis's superb, accurate, coloured illustrations of the birds. To aid beginners, a constant-sized Australian Magpie illustration appears at the foot of each of the coloured plates. While this would provide users with an invaluable comparison for size of an unidentified bird, keeping the magpie a constant size on each plate has perhaps resulted in the illustrations of some birds being much smaller than necessary. Many delightful black and white illustrations of species are snuggled in and around species texts.

In the introductory section of the book, Hilary Thompson classifies the habitats in which birds can be found in Adelaide and the corresponding bird species likely to be found there. This classification focuses on the location of the habitats, e.g. coastal scrub, rather than the structure of the modified habitat that actually still exists, e.g. lawn covered sandhills. In places it also understates the extent of habitat degradation, e.g. on p. 6 "...the remaining stands of woodland are in the hills, much of them protected at least nominally in reserves...". Unfortunately, combined with the inclusion of such a large region of the Mt Lofty Ranges in "Adelaide", this focus may result in readers gaining a false impression of the richness and security of Adelaide's bird fauna. However, this may be more than compensated for by readers of this enthusiastic and informative book being encouraged to discover and appreciate what birds are still there.

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