

Book Reviews

Parrots of The World

JOSEPH M. FORSHAW AND FRANK KNIGHT 2010.

CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria. A\$39.95. Paperback with 336 pages, 146 colour plates, 375 maps.

Joseph Forshaw can justifiably be called the original keeper of the flame when it comes to having collated knowledge of the natural history of parrots generally and the “biographies” of individual species. His landmark *Australian Parrots* (Landsdowne, 1969) and *Parrots of the World* (Landsdowne, 1973), the latter illustrated by William T. Cooper, fuelled a revolution in scientific study of parrots in the wild. Indeed, things probably long ago reached the point where no single author could hope to reasonably update the original *Parrots of the World* as a book (a website perhaps?). What Forshaw has gone on to do, however, is provide vehicles for bird observers to seek out and identify parrots in the field wherever they occur. This latest book, illustrated beautifully by Frank Knight, continues that trend. It is a more compact version of their earlier guide to the parrots of the world but this time perfectly sized for field use.

Organized geographically, the plates depict the world’s parrots in enough detail to identify all species and age and sex classes when seen under most circumstances that involve a reasonable look at a bird. Special effort has been made to illustrate over- and underwing patterns as well as shapes and silhouettes of birds in flight. Detail is shown of other parts of the plumage where appropriate such as of the heads of fig-

parrots *Cyclopsitta* spp. The text is minimal and covers identification, geographical variation, similar species, distribution and localities at which to see the birds.

Designed as a field guide, the book is part of a newer niche in the world of bird book publishing. That is, where we are now familiar with series of books on the natural history and biology of bird families of the world, this one deals with one order and primarily as a field guide. As a field guide relevant across several continents and oceans, it mirrors perhaps most closely a book such as Hayman *et al.*’s (1986) guide to shorebirds of the world.

Taxonomic quibbles in the book are mostly that: quibbles. A friendly email to the author or publishing one’s own data on a given subject are the best way to deal with most of these things. There is always something taxonomic in the publication pipeline that will quickly render a book like this slightly out-of-date. Still puzzling to me, however, and admittedly a hobby-horse, but of interest to Australian readers is the author’s evident reluctance to treat the Cloncurry Parrot as a subspecies of the *Barnardius zonarius*, i.e., as *B. z. macgillivrayi*, instead of as a subspecies of the Mallee Ringneck *B. barnardi*. It’s not as thorny an issue as that of whether Eastern and Pale-headed Rosellas should be conspecific, I suggest, if only because there are more published data (see summary in book review in *Emu* (2007, 107: 74-75). If two species, not one, are to be recognized for the ringneck parrots, then the ball is more and more in the court of those who defend treatment of *macgillivrayi* as a subspecies of *B. barnardi* to explain why that makes evolutionary sense and why *macgillivrayi* should *not* be a form of *B. zonarius*. Parenthetically, I add that

all ringneck parrots have a frontal band – its presence or absence often being used as a character. Only the Mallee Ringneck and south-western Australian form of *B. zonarius* have it plainly differentiated from the rest of the head, at least in our visible spectrum, and so visible in the field. Close examination of a Port Lincoln Parrot specimen will show that its frontal band is of a black that is darker than the black of the rest of the head. Similarly, the green of a Cloncurry Parrot's frontal band differs, albeit slightly, from the crown when examined closely. All enthusiasts of parrots, whether focussed on the birds' biology or spectacular diversity, will be glad to have this book. It is well-priced and so is great value. In a review I wrote a few years ago of this book's predecessor, I suggested that the parrots of the world could rest easy knowing that their biographies have been in the capable hands of Joseph Forshaw. I could add that they can also rest easy knowing that Frank Knight has now illustrated them in at least two books if not more for some species. Again, though, I hope that obituaries of the world's parrots will not need to be written by this team of writer and illustrator in any number soon, and preferably never.

Leo Joseph

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