

Book Reviews

The Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia (Second Edition)

RICHARD THOMAS, SARAH THOMAS, DAVID ANDREW AND ALAN McBRIDE 2011.

CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria. A\$49.95. Paperback with 480 pages, 60 colour photographs and maps.

As a relative newcomer to birding, I can still remember the joy of receiving the original "Thomas & Thomas" shortly after its publication. The book was used extensively to plan a trip to Cape York the following year and, indeed, many trips thereafter.

Many things have changed since the original publication. In particular the rise of the internet as a source of information, the preponderance of four-wheel drive vehicles, improvements in road conditions and taxonomy.

The original publication may also have been, at least to some extent, a victim of its own success in that some of the sites included have since become "off-limits" to the majority of visitors. It is, therefore, pleasing to see that the new edition pays far greater attention to the need to seek permission prior to entering private property. Perhaps the need to also observe road closures should be stressed in any future editions.

The new edition is a far weightier publication (826 grams versus 372 grams for the first edition) and this is at least partly due to the inclusion of 30 pages of colour photographs. Whilst there is no doubting the aesthetic appeal and quality

of the photographs, I am not sure that they add much value to the publication.

Other than the photographs the layout of the new edition will be very familiar to anyone who has used the first edition. As stated in the introduction, the purpose of the book is to give a birder the best chance to see all of the birds of Australia. By starting the journey in Victoria authors may upset the sensitivity of some in other States. This is particularly true of South Australia as there are very few birds remaining to be seen by the time the traveller arrives there. The introduction does, however, note that the book does not attempt to duplicate wider information available in regional guides.

The general format of the book with a chapter for each State and major offshore territories, followed by a chapter on where to find each species is well suited to the new birder, overseas traveller, or anyone looking to find birds outside their home locality. The contribution of local birders and professional guides is evident throughout and we should be grateful for the generosity of spirit of those providing the information.

The book also includes useful contacts and, whilst this does appear a little more commercial in focus than in the first edition, I am sure that the majority of readers will find it useful.

One thing that a review of the book did show was that information on "useful contacts" appeared to be more up-to-date than in the State-

by-State sections. It is a pity that more effort was not taken to ensure consistency throughout.

The coverage of subspecies has taken a higher profile in the new edition, although the extent of coverage sometimes appears to favour the local contributors, or authors, preferences rather than any particular logic. One example is the focus in South Australia on the three subspecies of Slender-billed Thornbill, whilst ignoring subspecies of the Short-tailed Grasswren. Considering that this is one of the few endemic species for South Australia it is odd that the location of one of the subspecies is totally omitted.

The question of the continuing relevance of this book must be raised, especially as the market moves towards electronic field guides, which can be updated much more readily and at lower cost for the user. Even though changes will continue in technology, taxonomy and access I would heartily recommend this book as a valuable addition to any birders library, but especially to overseas visitors and those new to birding.

Brian Walker
281 Hancock Road
Banksia Park
Adelaide, SA 5091
brian.walker@bigpond.com