

REVIEWS

Birds of the World. Version 2.0 (1996). [Computer software.] By C.G. Sibley. Available from: Thayer Birding Software, P.O. Box 43243, Cincinnati, OH, U.S.A. 45243. \$US75 (+ \$US10 for overseas postage).

This programme is an up-dated computerised version of the massive book *Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World* by Sibley and B.L. Monroe, first published in 1990 (reviewed in *Notornis* 38: 251-252). It runs under Microsoft "Windows" version 3.x or 95, requiring a 386 CPU or higher and at least 4Mb of RAM.

There is an entry for each of the world's 9,946 species of birds (9,672 species in the 1990 book), giving a brief summary of distribution, habitat preferences and status. There are informative sections for each bird group (orders, families, subfamilies) as well as useful introductory sections (on classification, naming, phylogeny etc.). If printed out the computerised book would run to about 1,000 pages.

The beauty of the system is being able to jump about the "book" with ease. Using a simple search facility you can move quickly to any species entry via its English or generic name. The table of contents has "hypertext jump points" which bring forward any order or family at the click of a mouse. Introductory sections and the blocks of text for entire families can be printed.

Errors in the 1990 book have been corrected, and this edition incorporates findings from the very latest journal articles, all fully referenced. Updates of this version can be loaded down free from an Internet Web Page.

With this software on your hard disc, an encyclopaedia of bird species is always at hand. I have found it easy to operate and extremely useful. I recommend it to anyone with an interest in the birds of several regions.

B.J. GILL

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds, Volume 3: Snipe to Pigeons, by Higgins, P.J. & S.J.J.F. Davies (Editors), 1996. Oxford University Press, Melbourne. ISBN 0 19 5530705. 1058 pp 60 colour plates. AUS\$300

HANZAB Vol. 3 completes coverage of the Order Charadriiformes (Scolopacidae, sandpipers and allies; Glareolidae, coursers and pratincoles; Lariidae, skuas, jaegers, gulls and terns) and then covers Columbiformes, (the pigeons and doves.) The format follows that of Vol.2, with colour plates spread through the book. In each plate individual birds are numbered for identification and text page reference given in the plate legend. Unfortunately the main index at the beginning does not give the plate page, so you must first find the text.

Because the majority of HANZAB 3 deals with migrants, only 20 of the 129 species covered breed regularly in the New Zealand region; five of them are endemics. A further 46 species have been recorded as migrants or vagrants. It is reassuring to

note that despite this minority quota, at least 22 New Zealanders acted as contributors and reviewers. The OSNZ presence is also strong in this volume, with national wader counts being well used. Other unpublished information is also incorporated, especially the large wader biometric data sets of the New Zealand and Australasian Wader Study Groups.

Most of the illustrations are by Jeff Davies (shorebirds, gulls, pigeons and doves and many terns), with additional plates by M.J. Bamford (terns), N. Day (terns), B. Jarrett (skuas), F. Knight (skuas, terns) and P. Slater (terns). All the illustrations are excellent, and the mix of artists does not detract much from the product. However colour and layout do vary between plates; the *Catharacta* skuas are unusually grey and some of the gull and tern plates border on being overly cluttered. Where sexes and ages differ these are illustrated. With turnstones for example, breeding adults of both sexes are distinguished, as are non-breeding and juvenile plumages. Difficult terns are well represented, with six Common tern plumages and moult stages shown.

The interest of most New Zealanders will focus on the shorebirds, gulls, terns and skuas, along with the New Zealand Pigeon. The detailed discussions of plumages of the more difficult waders (such as Little stint) will prove invaluable – these are summarised from a wide range of sources and while seemingly overwhelming in detail at first, there may be cases where such detail is required to clinch identification. As an identification reference, HANZAB is a mine of information.

Taxonomic ordering follows that of Christidis & Boles (1994) which may be unfamiliar to most New Zealanders. Volume 2 did not fully follow this reference because work was too far advanced when the recommendations of Christidis & Boles were published. Thus current thinking on taxonomic divisions is up to date. Bar-tailed Godwits are split into three subspecies; *lapponica* breeding in northern Eurasia, *baueri* breeding in north eastern Siberia and West Alaska, and the hitherto little recognised *menzhieri* from northern Siberia between the Khatanga River and the Kolyma River delta. Supporting evidence for the legitimacy of this third subspecies and its occurrence in northwest Australia is provided.

Only a few common names given differ from those in use in New Zealand – Lesser Knot becomes the Red Knot (the name used in almost every other country) and the *Stercorarius* skuas are referred to as jaegers.

So what is the quality of information like? In the two species for which I have enough specific knowledge to judge, Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot, it is excellent but not faultless. In the section on geographical variation in knots, the subspecies *islandica* is misspelt as *icelandica* four times. A claim that the size of mollusc taken by knots varies with latitude has not been tested or shown but is taken as fact. Because describing the biology of species outside the HANZAB area is not attempted, local references are used heavily in the texts. This is very thorough; in addition to existing summaries (e.g. Birds of the Western Palearctic), godwit and knot texts have 149 and 136 references, respectively. However the limitations of this are noticeable. Local publications are sometimes given too much weight. A

Miranda Naturalists' Trust Newsletter is quoted for Broad-billed Sandpiper claiming the species is "regularly seen by Auckland and South Auckland birders." This is hardly biologically relevant, especially as all the sightings are listed in the same paragraph. Likewise the focus on local tidbits of information in the diet section ignores the sometimes extensive overseas literature that can be far more important overall. Thus the food of Red Knots is summarised as "Omnivorous: worms, bivalves, gastropods, crustaceans and echidnoderms." It is only when reading the diet breakdowns further on that the predominance of molluscs in the diet becomes obvious, though the species is globally considered a mollusc specialist away from the breeding grounds.

As a waderologist I find myself delving into HANZAB 3 frequently, on all sorts of missions. It provides the most detailed and concise summaries on migratory shorebirds on the East Asian Flyway (paired with HANZAB 2 of course!), and should be the first recourse for tricky identifications of possible vagrants. Written by Australasians incorporating Australasian data, it is the first reference work to provide specific identification and moult information for many species as they occur in this region. These analyses are excellent and for this reason alone I can recommend it. Furthermore it clearly identifies gaps in knowledge for future work.

There is of course the price. HANZAB is more expensive than *Birds of the Western Palearctic* and the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, and many New Zealanders will baulk at paying over \$300 for a single book. However those who do will always be popular among local birdwatchers and ornithologists. Besides, where else could you learn that the claw of the middle toe of the Black-tailed Godwit has a pectinate inner edge?

LITERATURE CITED

- CHRISTIDIS, L & BOLES, W.E. 1994. *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*. Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union monograph 2. Melbourne. 112 pages

PHIL BATTLE