

# HANZAB is now on NZ Birds Online!

Which probably reads as gobbledegook, unless you are a serious bird nerd. HANZAB is the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, and is the most comprehensive compilation of information on birds of this part of the world ever produced. The seven volumes were published between 1990 and 2006, and occupy 47 cm of bookshelf – if you are among the few bird enthusiasts with access to a full set.



The seven volumes of HANZAB (volumes 1 & 7 were each published in 2 parts, making making nine ‘books’ in all). Image: Colin Miskelly, Te Papa

[New Zealand Birds Online – The digital encyclopaedia of New Zealand birds](#) – is a collaboration between Te Papa, [Birds New Zealand \(the Ornithological Society of New Zealand\)](#), and the [Department of Conservation](#). Launched in June 2013, the website contains a wealth of information, images and sound files for all bird species in New Zealand, including [ancient fossils](#) or the most recent wind-blown vagrants (e.g. [straw-necked ibis](#) and [streaked shearwater](#)).

One of the novel features of NZ Birds Online is the presentation of existing published information from a selection of books about New Zealand birds. These are presented as a series of book-cover icons at the lower right of each species page. Clicking on any book cover opens a pdf of information and images about the focal species, extracted from the book. For example, on the [Chatham Island snipe](#) page, six such book-cover icons can be seen, and are portals to much more detailed information than the c.1000 words of text on the main webpage.

Book cover icons as they appear on NZ Birds Online species pages. The HANZAB (Volume 3) icon is fourth from the top in this example.

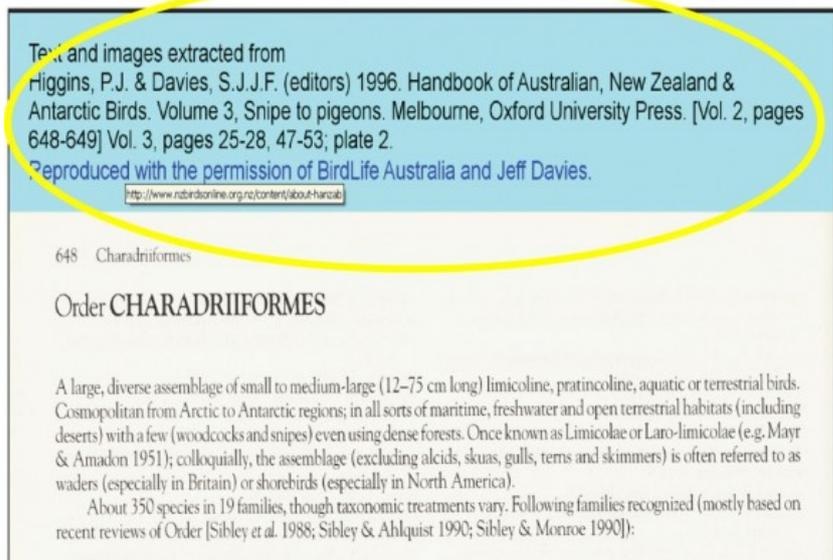
The books selected for presentation on NZ Birds Online contain complementary information on New Zealand birds, presented species by species – and have been reproduced with the permission of the publishers and copyright holders. From the outset of the project in 2010, I had my eye on HANZAB to join the stable of book titles. Not only does it contain more detailed information on the birds of our region than any other publication, but few birdwatchers possess their own full set of volumes. NZ Birds Online was an ideal platform to make relevant parts of HANZAB more accessible to people who seek to learn more about New Zealand birds – provided that the copyright holders were supportive of the idea. An added bonus from the scanning process is that the 354 pdfs produced can be searched digitally using OCR (optical character recognition), if there is a particular piece of information that you seek.

Production of HANZAB was a massive 2-decade long project for the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union (RAOU, now [BirdLife Australia](#)). Its statistics are superlative, including 9600 pages of text, 413 colour plates, six main editors, eleven artists, and many hundreds of contributing authors and sponsors. The seven volumes were all published by Oxford University Press, Melbourne, in association with RAOU. Copyright for the HANZAB text, maps and line drawings is held by BirdLife Australia, and the individual artists retain copyright for the colour plates that they produced. The New Zealand birding community owes a great debt of gratitude to BirdLife Australia, Jeff Davies, Peter Marsack, Nicolas Day, Kim Franklin, Derek Onley, Frank Knight, Peter Slater, Mike Bamford, Brett Jarrett and James Luck for their permission to reproduce extracts from HANZAB on NZ Birds Online.



HANZAB volume 4 in the process of being scanned. Image: Colin Miskelly, Te Papa

But getting permission to reproduce extracts from HANZAB was only one step – and there were many steps in the process of producing the species-by-species extracts as they appear on NZ Birds Online. Every page and colour plate had to be scanned to create a tif file, then each species extract was compiled from (typically) four different sections of the original, combining information on the relevant bird Order, Family and species, plus 1-3 colour plates illustrating the species. Each extract had its own citation header explaining where the information was copied from (see sample screen shot below), plus 1-4 embedded hyperlinks leading to the '[About HANZAB](#)' page on NZ Birds Online.



Screenshot of a sample HANZAB extract, showing how their citation information is presented on NZ Birds Online.

Be warned that most of the HANZAB extracts are big – and some are very big. NZ Birds Online alerts you to the size of the file that you are about to download. If you want to test the speed of your broadband connection, try the 118 MB [Australian magpie](#) HANZAB extract.

All these steps required funding that was beyond the original NZ Birds Online budget. The scanning quote didn't sound too bad at \$2 a page, but try multiplying by 9600! And that was only the start of the digitisation process. Many thanks to [TFBIS](#) and the [Birds New Zealand Research Fund](#) for providing the funding that allowed the concept and goodwill to become a reality.