

bolder than those of the "Field Guide," and with a peculiar attraction that overrides any feeling of inaccuracy of stance, proportion or colouration. Briefly listed on the facing page are "Field Characters," "Distribution and Habitat," and "Breeding" and the conciseness of these entries is commendable. Pedants may find something to quibble over here and there but for those who demand detail or want to know the exceptions, the "For Further Reading" section will lead them to Oliver's "New Zealand Birds" or to the "Annotated Checklist." The species in this first volume of "Town, Pasture & Freshwater Birds" include White-faced Herons, Mallards, Skylarks, Pipits, Hedge Sparrows, Redpolls, Magpies and so on, with such lesser-known, but none-the-less easily seen species as the Cirl Bunting, the Australian Coot, and the Spur-winged Plover. A reviewer in a city newspaper (*Evening Post*, Wellington, 7 Nov. 1972, p. 24) who extolled the virtues of this "excellent book about birds" laments the exclusion of the Tui and the Bellbird "which are both more commonly seen nationally than some of the 40 birds included . . ." One cannot have everything in one's own backyard and what is "common" in my garden set on the forested slopes of eastern Wellington Harbour is not even the same as two other ornithologists find in their own gardens a few hundred yards up and down the road respectively. However, Ross McKenzie's book comes into its own now, providing the key to "how and where to find" these "common" birds and the search for them can be readily extended into something quite exciting stimulated from the possession of the little Fiat book.

Use of the Fiat Book of Common Birds will make us richer and wiser in knowing what is around us and it will be the answer for those who have longed for "something" to tell them what "it" is in their garden or on their holidays not so far from the urban sprawl; to echo the words of the writer of the preface, Dr R. A. Falla, Chairman of the Nature Conservation Council — "The readers of this book may be assured that every one of the birds figured and described has something to contribute to their enlightenment and enjoyment."

E. W. D.

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D. L. SERVENTY, V. N. SERVENTY, & JOHN WARHAM. *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. Pp. 1-254, figs 1-127, col. pls 128-142. A. H. & A. W. Reed, Sydney, &c., 1971.

It is a regrettable practice among professional ornithologists to submit the results of their researches for publication in the widest possible spectrum of journals. As a result, the literature of the sea-birds of the Australasian region has for too long been scattered among a multiplicity of books, reports and journals (not all of them ornithological) throughout the English-speaking world, often unknown and too often inaccessible to all but workers in museums and universities. To have all this work summarised in a single volume could not fail to be a welcome event; for such a volume to be produced by three workers pre-eminent in recent research in this field makes the volume a landmark in the literature of Australasian birds.

Following a two page preface, which explains the scope and purpose of the book, with acknowledgements of help received, the

main text is in five sections. Section I, "The Geography of Australian Sea-birds" (18 pages) briefly surveys natural regions in the oceans, Australian marine provinces, characteristics of the water masses around Australia, the physiographical habitat, and the environment during and since the Pleistocene. Section II, "The Sea-bird Fauna" (16 pages) discusses the categories of Australian sea-birds, and some aspects of the biology of Australian sea-birds. Section III, "Research on Australian Sea-birds" (three pages) briefly describes the historical background and current programmes, with suggestions for future programmes and valuable advice on methods. Section IV, "Sea-bird Conservation Problems in Australia" (four pages), draws attention to the damage done by the armed services, whose need for gunnery and bombing targets is an ever present danger to breeding populations of the sea-birds.

Section V, "The Systematic Account of Australian Sea Birds," covers the Penguins, the Albatrosses, Shearwaters and other Petrels, Frigate Birds, Tropic birds, Cormorants, Boobies and Gannet, Pelican, Skuas, Gulls, Terns, and Noddies, in all 104 of Australia's 715 birds.

Each account includes a brief but adequate description of the species, including any differences owing to sex or age, with measurements of series of specimens (in millimetres), and notes of flight, behaviour, etc., likely to aid identification at sea. A most useful feature is the addition, in many species, of length, and wing-span in inches, and weight. Other headings in each account are status (in Australia), voice, display (where known), breeding (season, nest, egg, and nestling), food and breeding distribution. The accounts vary in detail according to the status of the bird concerned.

The comprehensive bibliography contains 349 references, ranging over a century in time, and by no means all in English. The reader can be reasonably confident that any significant information omitted was unknown at the time the book went to press.

The photographs are well selected and well printed. The sketches are all useful, though uneven in quality, those of the grey petrel and Wilson's storm petrel being perhaps the least satisfactory. The authors have succeeded in achieving a combination of brevity with lucidity and readability, but the inexperienced should beware of reading contradictions into the text which are only apparent. For instance, the statement that "At sea the shy albatross may be seen to be larger than other mollymawks which are often present and it appears as a rather bulky, short-bodied bird," is not easy to reconcile with the measurements of length, wingspan and weight cited for this species and the black-browed mollymawk.

Anyone with a casual interest in sea-birds will enjoy reading this book; every person with a serious interest in the subject will surely want to own it; and it should be on the shelves of every school library, at least down to intermediate level. Of the 105 species of sea-birds on the current New Zealand checklist, all but 16 are covered in the book, and of these all but two penguins, one petrel and one gull are uncommon.

D. H. B.

[Reprinted, with kind permission, from *The Press*, Christchurch, 1 July 1972, p. 10. This book has also been reviewed by M. J. Imber, in the *Proceedings of the N.Z. Ecological Society* 19: 175 - 176, 1972.]