

REVIEW

Shorebirds of Australia

Andrew Gerring; Lindsay Agnew; Sandra Harding (Editors)

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When this book arrived on the bookshelf at the Miranda Shorebird Centre I already had the still relevant and excellent Hayman *et al.* (1986), along with 7 other specialist wader books, so I had to ask myself if I could justify spending the money on yet another book on this group of birds. However, after leafing through it, I quickly realised that although this book is primarily for an Australian market, and we are unlikely to see a hooded plover (*Thinornis rubricollis*) or plains-wanderer (*Pedionomus torquatus*) in New Zealand, most of it is absolutely relevant to New Zealand. It covers much more than a pure field guide and has an impressive list of authors so I bought the book and am pleased that I did.

The 7 chapters are each written by respected shorebird experts, many well known to OSNZ members. Chapter 1 covers the evolutionary history and taxonomy of shorebirds and is by Andrew Geering. This chapter asks and answers the question "what defines a shorebird". It includes 2 interesting charts, one of which shows the evolutionary relationships of shorebirds deduced using molecular data. Chapter 2 is on breeding ecology and is by Pavel Tomkovich and Micheal Weston. At 24 pages it is well supported with photographs and charts, describing where and when shorebirds breed, mating systems, parental care, and predation. Chapter 3 is by Phil Battley and Danny Rogers. It includes 15 pages on migration and covers the origins of migration, biological clocks, energetics, differential migration, discussions on departures, routes, arrivals and what happens in between. Chapter 4 is by Paul Finn and is on feeding ecology & habitat selection. It covers feeding behaviour, harvestability of prey, flock feeding and spatial distribution, the latter supported by an interesting chart describing "factors that commonly influence habitat selection by feeding shorebirds". Chapter 5 is by Danny and Annie Rogers and covers plumages and topography. These 13 pages go well beyond the usual single diagram found in a field guide. The 11 diagrams by Robert Mancini, along with accompanying text, are excellent and include topography, "the appearance of the upper parts, as influenced by the posture of the scapulars" and

patterns of colouration in individual feathers and the terms used to describe them. Chapter 6 by David Stewart, Dannie Rogers and Annie Rogers is the largest chapter. It comprises about half of the book and describes 56 individual species in detail, including all of the Australian residents and the most frequent migrants to that country. Each species is described on 2 pages, including 3 or 4 good photographs, descriptions of adult breeding, non-breeding and juvenile birds, flight, voice, range, habits, differentiation from similar species and a distribution map (Australia only). There is also a brief description, without illustrations, of 23 shorebirds that are vagrant to Australia. The chapter concludes with a list of 119 shorebird sites in Australia and the main species present at each. Chapter 7 describes threats to shorebirds and conservation actions and is by Sandra Harding, Jim Wilson and Andrew Geering. It covers the importance of staging sites in the flyway, threats to shorebirds, damming of rivers and extraction of water, wetland reclamation, hunting, harvesting of benthic invertebrates for human consumption and bait, disturbance, and global warming. The chapter goes on to discuss managing the threats, international treaties and government legislation, helping to provide conservation outcomes, and what the reader can do in Australia to improve the future for shorebirds, most of which is also entirely applicable to New Zealand.

In summary the book is divided between descriptions of individual species and information about shorebirds in general. If I looked for something to criticise it would be that the description of sizes of the species gives a range of lengths but not mass. I consider the latter, as provided in Heather and Robertson (1996), to be very useful. For example, in New Zealand variable oystercatchers (*Haematopus unicolor*) and South Island pied oystercatchers (*Haematopus finschi*) show little difference in length but there is a difference in mass. A further example, albeit from a different group, is little (*Sterna albifrons*) and fairy terns (*Sterna nereis*) where there is no difference in length but substantial differences in mass, so clearly this is a useful measure in the field. It would also have been helpful if there were more on the differences between some subspecies *e.g.* whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) or the sand plovers (*Charadrius spp.*), but to be fair there is a limit to the amount of information that can be packed into the 2 pages allocated to each species and this book does not waste any space. This is also not a book for twitchers wanting detailed descriptions of vagrants from the Americas and of course New Zealand resident birds such as wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) and New Zealand dotterel (*Charadrius obscurus*) are not included.

I think the book is well written, and full of interesting and useful information for New Zealand birders, including those with no intention of going to Australia, and I am glad I have it.

Hayman,P. Marchant,J. and Prater,T. (1986). Shorebirds:
An Identification Guide. Houghton Mifflin.

LITERATURE CITED

Heather, B. D. and H. A. Robertson (1996). The Field Guide
to the Birds of New Zealand. Auckland: Viking.

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