

embryonic bird have been found in the stomach of a Shining Cuckoo (Gill 1989), suggesting predation unconnected with parasitism.

There have been three previous New Zealand reports of Shining Cuckoos carrying eggs. Michie (1948) on separate occasions saw a Shining Cuckoo eating the contents of a Chaffinch's egg (*Fringilla coelebs*) and Grey Warbler's egg, and then dropping the shell (months of observation not recorded). In November 1985 at about 2 p.m., a Shining Cuckoo was seen carrying a whitish egg (Skinner 1986). There are similar reports from Australia (e.g. Morris & Catchpole 1978).

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REVIEWS

Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World, by C.G. Sibley and B.L. Monroe, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990. Hardback, 1111pp, price \$US125.

This enormous 3 kg book is a systematic list of all living species of birds (plus recent extinctions like the Huia) with a statement on the geographical distribution and habitat of each. Altogether, 9672 species are recognised, 59% of them passerines. A standardised English name is provided for each bird, and these are given, along with generic and specific names, in the very thorough index. Much information on alternative English and scientific names is provided in a codified form by the use of symbols and typefaces. A number up to 5 digits long that has the potential to be used in computer databases is assigned to every species. The numbering system is a complicated one that extends to all species the American Ornithologists' Union numbering system for North American birds that has been in use for a century. A section headed "World Numbers" lists all species in numerical order.

An interesting innovation is to show the superspecies to which a species belongs by inserting a specific name in square brackets between the generic and specific names. Thus Buller's Shearwater, for example, is listed as *Puffinus [pacificus] bulleri*, which indicates that *bulleri* is a member of the *pacificus* superspecies. This can be a little disconcerting until you become

accustomed to it. Also, in some places the authors are likely to have jumped to wrong conclusions, as for example the placing of the Chatham Island Warbler in the *igata* superspecies, when it is morphologically so different from other *Gerygone* as to have been placed at one time or other in its own genus or subgenus *Hapolorhynchus*.

In the main text the species are arranged, of course, according to the radical new classification developed by Sibley, Monroe and Ahlquist on the basis of studies of the hybridisation of DNA. So do not expect to find birds in the order to which you may be accustomed. The Table of Contents serves also as a useful outline of the classification, and gives the number of genera and species recognised in each group from subclass to tribe.

A reference list is provided of the mainly taxonomic papers cited in the main text. There is a section containing 25 outline maps between them covering all countries of the world and showing important place names. A gazetteer of more than 3000 place names includes all names mentioned in the main text and cross-references to the maps where appropriate. The book is strongly bound and printed on archival-quality paper. I noticed very few typographical errors.

A cursory glance at how the book reports New Zealand birds reveals some shortcomings. New Zealand is not mentioned under Chukar. The scientific names of the Kakapo, New Zealand Falcon and Huia are misspelt in the main text. The Stephens Island Wren is said to have occurred formerly on Stewart Island – presumably an error for Stephens Island, which is not mentioned. “Steven Island Wren” is given as one of three alternative English names, but this name can surely be discounted as an old spelling or misspelling. It is easy to have quibbles with details in such a monumental work; in general it accounts for New Zealand birds accurately and well.

Inevitably, there are deviations from the names we use in the 3rd edition of our checklist. The Sacred Kingfisher is listed as *Todirhamphus sanctus*. All cormorants/shags are placed in *Phalacrocorax*. The White-faced Heron is put in *Egretta*. Potts’s 1871 name *novaezelandiae* is used for the Australian Little Bittern. The Shore Plover is put in *Charadrius*, and *Thinornis* as a generic synonym is wrongly placed with the previous species in the list. The Welcome Swallow is given as *Hirundo neoxena* (Australia, no mention of New Zealand), distinct from *H. tahitica* (Asia, southwest Pacific). The Fernbird is put in *Megalurus* and the Chatham Island form is not recognised as a separate species. The Saddleback is placed in *Creadion*. On the positive side, at last there is a world list that recognises Pycroft’s Petrel as a distinct species!

In recent years numerous books listing the birds of the world have appeared reflecting the advanced state of knowledge about this group. The Sibley and Monroe contribution is sure to be one of the most useful in its genre if only for the detail provided on distribution and habitat and for the full indexing of both English and Latin names. The book is of course a push for acceptance of the authors’ own radical reclassification of birds. It remains for the future to see the degree to which the new system is accepted. However, as an up-to-date compendium on the status of the world’s birds, this book is a must.