

Review

Albatrosses

T. Lindsey

Australian Natural History Series. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria, Australia. 2008. ISBN-13: 9780643094215, 139 pp. Paperback AU \$39.95

"Oh god not another book on Albatross" I said to myself as this book landed on my desk. Yet despite the plethora of recent books on this, admittedly wonderful subject, I ended up being pleasantly surprised and think this one has a niche amongst all the others. "Albatrosses" comes from the Australian Natural History Series produced by Australia's CSIRO Publishing. Like others books in this series, it aims to present an all-inclusive and up-to-date account of a faunal group in "a style suitable for upper secondary or undergraduate level readers, as well as naturalists". Illustrated by New Zealand's own Rod Morris, this highly readable paperback offers an introduction to the world of the albatross in only 139 pages. Lindsey is recognized in Australia for his numerous publications in natural history and for a number of television programs he has written or directed. His style is friendly and on occasion, amusing and idiosyncratic. In

8 chapters he discusses issues as disparate as myths and legend, the fluctuating taxonomy of the group, breeding biology and human impacts. His discussion of taxonomy is thoughtful and accurate (in my opinion). An especially accurate quote I love, describing 1 author's (misguided) attempt at a taxonomy especially tickled "they used the notion that, no matter how controversial, experimental or flawed any ruler might be you can still use it with confidence to find out if A is bigger than B"

There is thoughtful discussion of adaptations that allow albatrosses to thrive in the horrendous southern oceans. There are useful tables summarizing such things as the breeding timing of all the species and even morphometrics. There is, an only too short account (given the restriction of the size of the book), of the challenges that face researchers and all those that wish these remarkable birds to survive in the modern world. The illustrations are well chosen and well reproduced. Although the book is aimed at the general reader rather than professional ornithologist, it is pleasing to see that there are 17 pages of references and footnotes. Although I started as a skeptic, I warmed to this book and recommend it to all those that wish to read a short but accurate account of the world of the Albatross.

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