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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

EDITED BY R. TODD ENGSTROM

The following critiques express the opinions of the individual evaluators regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and value of the books they review. As such, the appraisals are subjective assessments and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or any official policy of the American Ornithologists' Union.

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Antarctic Guides

A Field Guide to the Wildlife of South Georgia.—Robert Burton and John Croxall. 2012. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 200 pp., 368 color illustrations. ISBN 9780691156613. Paper, $24.95.

A Visitor's Guide to South Georgia, 2nd ed.—Sally Poncet and Kim Crosbie. 2012. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 184 pp., 450 color illustrations. ISBN 9780691156583. Paperback, $29.95.

Antarctic Wildlife: A Visitor's Guide.—James Lowen. 2011. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 240 pp., 159 color photos. ISBN 9780691150338. Paperback, $22.95.

The Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife, 2nd ed.—Hadoram Shirihai. 2008. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 544 pp., 920 color illustrations. ISBN 9780691136660. Hardcover, $55.

Ornithologists have two required pilgrimages: the Galápagos and the Antarctic. Of the two, the Antarctic has been a bit harder to get to, until recently. A few, having caught the Antarctic disease, make a career of it. Some are clever enough to figure out how to get there on a funded research project with all the right permissions and logistical support. The rest have to go in company of other tourists. These are taken to the notable sites, guided by knowledgeable naturalists and historians. Even for rugged field ornithologists, there is no shame in this; it is the way it is. Whatever the method of getting there, whomever the company, the experience will be indisputably satisfying, both professionally and personally.

Princeton University Press seems to have an acquisitions editor enthralled with the Antarctic, as the Press has scoured the lists of its partners to offer a collection of Antarctic guides, all aimed at the visitor. Burton and Croxall's wildlife guide is the latest on the list. This book is a backpack-sized field guide for South Georgia. Why South Georgia? Although Antarctica is certainly the ultimate destination, with all due respect to the southern continent, it is sub-Antarctic South Georgia that is really the star of the Southern Ocean show. The bird experiences of South Georgia and nearby waters are what a trip to the Antarctic Convergence is all about. This guide covers succinctly the physical, climatic, historical, and conservation perspectives and then goes on to species accounts, each providing short but appropriate information on identification, distribution, and conservation. And who knows more of this than John Croxall? Species are illustrated by photographs, which, given how close a camera lens can come to the subjects, are uniformly informative. Where useful, identification notes are keyed to the photos. In addition to the birds, the book covers mammals, some invertebrates, and plants, all in sufficient detail to allow the visitor to confirm identifications and put them in context.

A distinct value of the field guide is its compactness. With compactness, necessarily, comes brevity, and a small taste of information does whet the appetite for more. Poncet and Crosbie's *Visitor's Guide* offers a good background for South Georgia wildlife observation, providing both general information and descriptions of the common landing sites. Its spiral-bound format, a bit strange at first, actually is quite handy; and it packs a lot of information, all usefully supplemental to the wildlife guide. Between the two guides, one can pretty well skip the evening naturalist's talks.

Getting to Antarctica itself is where Lowen's wildlife guide picks up. It has some good advice on cruising, very worthwhile to read because the wrong choice of ship can be very disappointing (for example, not actually being able to set foot on Antarctica). The book is organized around the three major passages, the Beagle Channel coming out of South America, the Drake Passage (which may or may not be a time when books can be looked at), and the Antarctic Peninsula, essentially the only Antarctic destination for cruisers. This organization focuses the mind on the subset of wildlife that is probable to be seen, although it seems to go too far in organizing the species accounts the same way, as some species are to be seen in more than one of these zones. The illustrations are mostly photographs collected into plates and do just fine. The fact is, some of these birds are hard to tell apart.

Most traveling biologists want to know more than what a bird is. How to have this easily in hand is something of a challenge. Internet is available on most ships (for a steep price); that's a help. The chance of lugging Marchant and Higgins's multivolume classic *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds* (HANZAB; 1990–2006, Oxford University Press) in the weight-restricted luggage seems slim indeed. However, there is a compromise

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between Burton and Croxall and HANZAB: Hadoram Shirihai's *Complete Guide*. Regretfully allowed to go out of print at the moment, it still is obtainable and should be a required companion for any ornithologist on an Antarctic and sub-Antarctic voyage. Making the information of HANZAB accessible while seriously updating the now 20-year-old seabird volumes, the *Complete Guide* is exactly that, both a guide and complete. The author provides impeccable identification descriptions with supplementary materials on distribution, biology, conservation, and taxonomy. The introductory chapters, providing an ecological synopsis, are thoroughly satisfying. Of superior value are the later chapters covering various regions, most of which are tour destinations. Geology, conservation, human history, birds, mammals, and how to visit are all covered and are of tremendous value—especially so the lists of bird species expected in each region. All of this has the ring of intimate familiarity on the part of the author, who clearly is both a keen observer and a thorough scholar. The book is intensely illustrated with over 900 color photos, all informative and many amazing. The copyright owners need to get this indispensable book back in print as soon as possible. The market is not insignificant.

For ornithologists, the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic are about the incredible, amazingly adapted, awe-inspiring birds and their conservation. The two long-recognized species of great albatrosses now appear to be seven species, more or less, each breeding-range restricted. Areas important to the pelagic conservation of Antarctic seabirds are now identifiable (see 54.247.127.44/marineIBAs/default.html), much of this progress owing to the generous collaborative spirit of Antarctic ornithologists such as Shirihai and the inspired leadership of Croxall. Fortunately, as ornithologists make their pilgrimages, they can have excellent book companions to pack with the field glasses, camera, and Dramamine.—James A. Kushlan, *P.O. Box 2008, Key Biscayne, Florida, USA 33149. E-mail: jkushlan@earthlink.net*

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Cuckoos of the World.—Johannes Erritzøe, Clive F. Mann, Frederik P. Brammer, and Richard A. Fuller. 2012. Christopher Helm, London. 544 pp., 600 color photographs, 36 color plates, and 150 distribution maps. ISBN 9780713660340. Hardbound, $110.00.—Cuckoos are an ancient and enigmatic avian family with a nearly global distribution. They are best known for the ~60 species that are obligate brood parasites; however, the other species in this family are equally fascinating, exhibiting such behaviors as facultative interspecific parasitism, cooperative breeding, polygyny, and polyandry. A few cuckoos, such as the Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) and Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*), are well represented in centuries of scientific literature, and in art and folklore; however, most species remain something of a mystery to us. Indeed, until fairly recently we lacked decent photographs, museum specimens, and accurate range maps for many species.

Cuckoos of the World is a welcome addition to our rather scanty list of published titles on the Cuculidae. This highly attractive and informative book is a recent entry in the Helm Identification Guides series. The key point here is that the book is an identification guide, not a field guide: it is certainly not meant to be carried around in your back pocket. This is akin to the well-known *Sibley Guide to Birds* (Sibley 2000), also an excellent reference source for checking your field notes and photographs or perusing at leisure in your home or office. Both books have approximately the same trim size; the hardbound version of *Cuckoos of the World* measures 18 × 24.5 × 3.5 cm.

Inside, *Cuckoos of the World* is a hybrid of *The Cuckoos* (Payne 2005) and *Family Cuculidae* (Cuckoos; Payne 1997) in *Handbook of Birds of the World, vol. 4: Sandgrouse to Cuckoos*, being somewhat similar in format to these two volumes, with the exception of more emphasis placed on some sections rather than others, and with the addition of hundreds of beautiful color photographs. *Cuckoos of the World* begins with a very brief introduction to the family, which is followed by some explanatory material (including a glossary), excellent color plates, detailed species accounts, an appendix (scientific and common names), and a lengthy bibliography.

I found the introduction rather rushed and somewhat too generalized. It may be impossible to summarize the Cuculidae effectively in only 10 pages (despite the small font size used), given the diversity of their ecology and behavior; by contrast, Payne (2005) devoted 163 pages to introductory material. Nevertheless, the authors use the little space that was allocated for this section admirably, providing some interesting examples and useful in-text citations. There is also a good overview of changes to cuculid systematics in the past decades; the book generally follows the taxonomy of Payne (2005), to which it adds a further four species, bringing the family's species count to 144. This differs to some degree from many traditional check-lists that range from 129 to 149 cuckoo species.

Thirty-six color plates feature superb illustrations of all species in classic field-guide style on a white background. The drawings are superior to the overly ornate plates in Payne (2005) and are similar in quality to those in *Handbook of Birds of the World*. This is no surprise, because the illustrators for *Cuckoos of the World* also contributed artwork to that series. Each plate features illustrations for sex and age classes, and for polymorphic species as required. Adjacent to each color plate is a short account of distribution and habitat preferences, and brief identifying features for the illustrated species. Cuckoos range in size considerably, from the tiny White-eared Bronze Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx meyeri*; 15 cm) to the gigantic Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo (*Carpococcyx renauldi*; 65–70 cm). It is unclear whether the drawings on each plate are to scale, but they appear to be so. The scale changes between plates, as expected; it would have been useful to have a printed scale on the bottom of each page for reference.

The bulk of the book comprises individual accounts for all species—with standard headings of Taxonomy, Field Identification, Voice, Description, Biometrics, Moult, Geographical Distribution, Habitat, Behavior, Breeding, Food, and Status and Conservation—arranged in order according to Payne (2005), based on the mtDNA studies of Sorenson and Payne (2005). This may be jarring to many readers more familiar with the substantially different, albeit traditional, taxonomic order in works such as Clements et al. (2012) and Payne (1997). In addition, some common names differ from previously published work, so I found it more useful to navigate through the accounts and color plates using the species' scientific names. A

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