

Birds of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago. A Photographic Guide

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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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Birds of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago. A Photographic Guide.—Brian J. Coates in collaboration with William S. Peckover. 2001. Dove Publications Pty. Ltd., Alderley, Queensland, Australia. 272 pp. ISBN 0-959-025-7 4X. \$39.00 (available through several ornithological booksellers in the United States). This handy book has photographs of 437 species of New Guinea birds, many of them illustrated with several photographs, often by more than one photographer. The overwhelming majority of the photographs were made by Brian Coates (221 species) mostly of free-living birds, and by the late William S. Peckover (179 species) who photographed netted birds in a portable cloth structure under controlled lighting conditions and then released them unharmed. Bruce Beehler, Morten Strange, Dawn and Clifford Frith, Peter Odekerken, Ian Burrows, and David Bishop contributed photographs of another 107 species, and photos of 13 species were contributed by several other photographers; many of these were of rarities not otherwise photographed.

The majority of the photographs are different from those published in Coates' two-volume classic *The Birds of Papua New Guinea* (1985, 1990, Dove Publications). In addition, 91 species are included in the present book that were not illustrated by photographs in the earlier work, including 15 species endemic to Irian Jaya, Indonesia (or West Papua, the western half of the island of New Guinea and not part of Papua New Guinea).

In many ways this volume serves as an addendum to Coates (1985, 1990), incorporating as it does so many species for which photographs were not available earlier and including as an appendix a check list of New Guinea and Bismarck Archipelago birds, broken down into west New Guinea (Irian Jaya, Indonesia), east New Guinea, and the Bismarck Archipelago (both in Papua New Guinea). There is also a list of references that have appeared since the larger work. There is a useful and concise introduction to the area, its bird habitats and avifauna, and a list of abbreviations and symbols used in the text. The text,

written by Coates, is in telegraphic style but is loaded with easily accessible information, including recent observations. There are a few name changes from the earlier volumes, mostly English names, and those are cross referenced.

Photographs have been carefully selected, when a selection is available, to show diagnostic characters. Especially useful are many photographs of birds in flight and illustrations of different plumages. The quality of reproduction is in general very good, surprisingly so for a book with so many photographs of differing color quality printed on the same page. Many photographs are spectacular, not only those of birds of paradise (where both major photographers excel), but also those of shy and retiring species that are difficult to see, much less photograph.

This volume is not a standard field guide (not all species are illustrated), nor does it claim to be. It can be viewed as a distillation and updating of Coates' earlier work, but it also stands alone as a useful book in its own right. It is full of up-to-date information in a very portable format and is a tribute to photographers whose love of the birds and the country overcame the hardships of field photography in New Guinea and provided us with this collection. How sad that William Peckover did not live to see it.—MARY LECROY, *Department of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, New York 10024, USA. E-mail: lecroy@amnh.org*