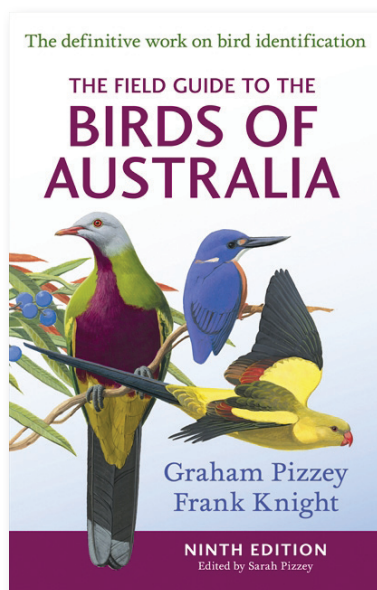


Book Review



The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia (Ninth Edition).

Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight. Edited by Sarah Pizzey. 2012. HarperCollins Publishers Pty Limited, Sydney, Australia. Paperback, 608 pp. ISBN 9780732291938. RRP \$45.

The original *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, carefully crafted by highly regarded naturalist Graham Pizzey and illustrated by Roy Doyle, was published in 1980. Over the years this field guide has been regularly revised and updated, culminating in this ninth edition. Since Graham Pizzey's passing in 2001, scientific editing of the updates has been undertaken by Peter Menkhorst (editions seven and eight) and now, for the first time, by Graham's daughter, Sarah Pizzey. Illustrations are now the work of Frank Knight, one of our leading natural history illustrators.

While the ninth edition incorporates many revisions and updates it follows a similar format to earlier editions. A 'quick find guide' inside the front and back covers, to help users quickly find the relevant page to identify their bird, is now presented as a 'visual index'. To facilitate identifications, 'the quick find guide' has been reworked so that species are grouped in the environment in which they are most likely to be encountered rather than in taxonomic order. The 'Introduction to the Guide' explains the set up of the book and the format of species accounts. Whether novice or experienced birdo, it is worth taking the time to read, or at least skim, this section if you are to get the most from the field guide. There is valuable information regarding field identification of birds as well as some general tips which will be of particular value to those newer to bird watching and identification.

In this ninth edition species accounts are provided for 842 species, including 86 vagrants. Species accounts and distribution maps have been amended to take into account new information. The order of species entries has been revised to be consistent with the new taxonomic order that has evolved with the advent of DNA technology. This is a major change and time is needed to assimilate this new order. In addition, the

vagrants, birds whose 'normal' range is outside Australia, are now grouped in a new section after the main body of species accounts. Thirteen new vagrants are included. Vagrants include seabirds (33 species), waterbirds (6), waders (25) and birds of bush and open country (22).

In keeping with the taxonomic changes, some 100 families of birds are now recognised in Australia and a brief introduction to each family (in their new form and order) is provided. Family introductions have been substantially amended since the previous edition. Appendices to the book include a glossary, a list of suggested further reading and references, and a list of major bird watching organisations within Australia. Unfortunately, lists of the more local birding groups, which are frequently of interest to amateur bird watchers, are not included. A separate index is provided for scientific and common names. While I prefer a single combined index – having a tendency to waste time navigating two indexes – this is a minor quibble and I can accept, if not understand, that others might prefer common names to be separated from scientific. It is reassuring to read that commonly used names have only been altered where there is a compelling reason.

In this field guide the all important illustrations show a good range of the diversity within each species – male, female, breeding, non-breeding, immature, juvenile and so on. For some species, images of perching birds are complemented by depictions of birds in flight. Illustrations are labelled simply to indicate the species (common name) and race, sex, age or breeding status as required. A number of the illustrations are enlivened by the inclusion of habitat features: foliage, logs, leaf litter and so on. To me, in a field guide, this is clutter which detracts from the job at hand – identification – but I am happy to acknowledge that this is a personal preference.

In 1980, in his foreword to the first edition of this field guide, the late Dr D. L. Serventy expressed his opinion that "The virtue of a field guide is that it contains all the information necessary, in pictures and text, to *identify* a bird. But no more." I find myself in agreement with this sentiment. In this field guide a fair amount of additional information is provided and, despite my above stated preferences and the associated extra weight and size of the book, I cannot help but be intrigued by all this extra information in one handy text.

Australian birdwatchers are spoilt by choice with four good national field guides now available. Each is good but different. If you are already a fan of the "Pizzey and Knight" field guide then this considerably updated ninth edition is well worth upgrading to. If you are now working with another guide then I would still recommend the "Pizzey and Knight" guide as it complements the other three guides. If you find that having four field guides is excessive (I do not), then look long and hard at each to decide which suits you best.

Sarah Pizzey is to be congratulated on bringing to fruition this ninth edition of what has always been a high quality field guide.

Judy Smith
Blaxland, NSW