

## CD REVIEW

### Australian Bird Call Series

#### Birds of the Greater Sydney Region — A Regional Field Guide

Fred Van Gessel, -2006. CDs plus inserts. Available from author: 64 Dorothy Ave, Woy Woy, NSW 2256 (\$20 per CD plus postage) and various ornithological outlets.

The first three CDs, from a series of four, are reviewed below — the fourth is due for release this year.

Fred Van Gessel's CD set, *Birds Of the Greater Sydney Region — A Regional Field Guide* is an absolute must for those wanting to become familiar with the calls of a surprisingly rich variety of birds located relatively close to Australia's main capital city. Fred's set of three CDs in this series cover the calls of more than 200 bird species that one may encounter within 300 kilometres of the Sydney CBD. This area extends north to about Taree, south to approximately Nowra and west over the Great Divide to Mudgee and Bathurst.

The set covers most of the passerines and are the ones most likely to be heard or seen in Sydney's bushland habitats. However, the CDs reviewed do not cover many of the non-passerine birdcalls, which one may encounter in this region such as quail, pigeons, doves and finches, but many of these are due to appear in the fourth CD. Waterbirds have not been included in the series. The inclusion of calls for this group of birds may not be considered as necessary as the passerine birds, as most are often identified or tracked down by sight. However, I would consider including the rails and crakes, which can easily be heard when walking past their habitat. By learning the call of one of the most elusive species, the Lewin's Rail, I have found them to be much more common than if I had relied on sightings alone.

Some species, though considered rare, may now be considered breeding residents in this region. These include the Eastern Grass Owl and White-eared Monarch. It is considered important to include the calls of such rare birds as this could result in increased reporting of such species within the region. Surprisingly the call of the Little Shrike Thrush has been included, which to my knowledge has only been recorded once or very rarely in this region and not nearly as much as the owl and monarch.

The CD inserts clearly show the common names and the recorded time for all the species on each CD. The calls are placed in similar order to the taxonomy by Christidis & Boles (1994), which is useful when trying to cross reference the bird calls to the birds shown in field guides as they follow this same taxonomy order. It would be even more helpful if the inserts also included page references to the popular field guides to help people link directly to a picture of the bird. Other recommendations could also include mentioning the most commonly used alternative names for the species and at least mentioning their scientific names. The CD inserts would also benefit from a brief description for each of the recorded calls as to the type of call (e.g., contact calls, alarm calls) recorded. The location and season of recording could also be added as calls may vary slightly for some species.

The reproduction quality of the birdcalls featured is overall very good. I have found the recordings of each species very clear and calls featured are good examples of what one may experience out in the field. Unwanted background sounds (like other birds, other animals, insects, wind and man made sounds) are also adequately filtered out so that the listener can direct their attention on the bird species that is the main focus of the recording. However, one exception I found was one of the call sequences of the Little Corella, where the call of Galahs in the background is quite distracting. This could confuse a listener not familiar with the respective calls. The high-pitched calls of particular species such as the Spotted Quail-thrush and Southern Emu-wren, which may be just audible to some listeners in the field, are adequately produced on the CD.

On each of the three CDs in this set, the bird name is clearly announced prior to the birdcall. This method is ideal when one wants to know the species before hearing the actual call. However, if the reverse occurred (call first), it could test the listener on what bird is making the call before they receive confirmation of what species made the call. I have found the latter a better way to learn calls and is a method that has been used by other bird recordists but this is a personal preference.

More than one call can be heard for many of the 200 species featured. Different dialects and seasonal variations to the birdcalls are provided, where possible. The importance of this is that people are out 'birding' at different times of the year and encounter birds under a range of circumstances — breeding, in alarm, when birds are contacting each other, etc.

By listening a number of times to recorded bird calls, it has personally made my bird watching much easier and I owe a great debt for my own 'birding' successes from listening to bird recordings such as Fred Van Gessel's. In fact I originally became familiar with the birds of the Sydney and Hunter Region through Fred's original set of bird recordings.

Getting familiar with recorded birdcalls enables many bird enthusiasts to focus on particular species, be it for 'twitching' or for conservation purposes. The ability to recognize as many birdcalls as possible of course, develops greater efficiency when performing bird surveys when birds can be recorded by both call and/or sighting. Also, learning the calls of particular rare species, such as the Regent Honeyeater, can be very useful when conducting surveys that focus only on a particular species.

Apart from the few points mentioned previously, I was very impressed with the quality, coverage of the different species of passerines and examples of calls for each particular species. In my opinion, the \$20 price tag attached to each CD in this set is little in comparison to the benefits gained from learning different calls and the enjoyment obtained from listening to the wonderful vocalizations of the birds of this region.

Christidis, L. and Boles, W. E. (1994). The taxonomy and species of birds of Australia and its territories. *Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union*. Monograph 2. Pp. 112.

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