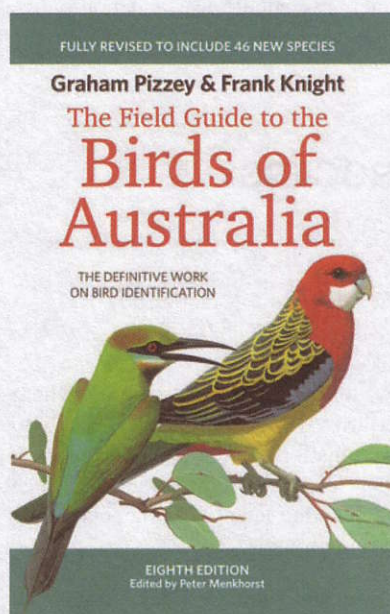


## BOOK REVIEW



### The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia

Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight. Edited by Peter Menkhorst (2007). HarperCollins Publishers. Paperback, 580pp, colour plates. ISBN 0207199353. RRP \$45.00.

The eighth edition of the Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight *The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* sees further enhancement of this informative and much-admired field guide. First published in 1980, it has long been a favourite amongst Australian birdwatchers, researchers and those with a general interest in birds. The field guide has continually evolved and each new addition has successfully provided up-to-date and accurate information in the succinct form necessary for a field guide. The eighth edition of the field guide continues this trend. A total of 820 species are covered, including all (excluding some recent additions and extinct species) wild bird species that have been recorded on one or more occasion on the Australian continent and its continental islands and seas.

Graham Pizzey (1930-2001) has long been highly regarded by bird watchers, professional and amateur ornithologists and naturalists for his knowledge and writings on Australian birds. Much of the information included in the species accounts was collected by Graham in the field as he toured widely across Australia observing birds. His informative observations have been crafted into the detailed species accounts that make up the field guide and add greatly to our knowledge of Australian birds.

The species accounts include statements on appearance and field marks (for male, female, juvenile and immature where appropriate), points of how to separate from species of similar appearance where necessary, broad habitat types used, voice, timing of breeding, nest type and construction materials, description of eggs, range and conservation status. Where sub-species occur, the species account provides particular information for each sub-species, be it plumage characteristics or distribution details. Each account is accompanied by a distribution map identifying the broad geographic range of the species in Australia. A brief summary of the commonness or rareness of each species is also given. Illustrations of species typically show adult and immature stages, including male and female plumages, and

breeding and non-breeding plumages where these differ. Sub-species are also illustrated in most cases. There are other interesting sections included that value-add to the field guide. These include introductory sections on identifying birds in the field, use of bird watching equipment and bird migration. Towards the end of the guide there are informative sections on classifying and naming Australian birds and a descriptive account of the families of Australian birds.

The Pizzey field guide includes the most detailed text of the major Australian bird field guides, none of which appears superfluous in a reference such as this. While this contributes to the Pizzey field guide being bulkier than other major Australian field guides, its size does not limit its usability or transportability. The eighth edition is a very polished publication and for this the team at HarperCollins Publishers should be commended. Peter Menkhorst as scientific editor has had a major role in continuing to ensure the field guide includes the latest and most accurate information.

Frank Knight's artwork is accurate and informative; for a field guide, the phrase 'a picture tells a thousand words' is of utmost importance and certainly achieved here. The species plates include a great range of detail and the size and quality of their reproduction means the subtlest points are not lost in the publication. The primary purpose of a field guide must be to facilitate identification of species, and the inclusion of background habitats (e.g. perching sites, foraging sites, etc.) in some of the plates not only adds life to some of the images, it also can be an aid to identification, particularly where it shows the species 'jizz'.

New information in this edition includes the addition of 46 species for the first time. This includes several additions arising from the inclusion of numerous Australian offshore islands (e.g. Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands) in the area covered by the new field guide. Updates to the taxonomy and naming of species have been made in line with Christidis and Boles (2008) *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds*, which at the time of publication of the field guide was still being developed and yet to be published, so some of the later changes have not been included in the field guide. Species accounts have been refined to include new information since the publication of the seventh edition and vagrant species are now clearly identified. One user-friendly addition is the 'Quick reference guide to bird groups' on the front end-papers, which will benefit users at all skill levels. This visual index allows users to quickly identify the major bird groups and to locate these within the field guide.

The field guide should have a wide audience and provides a valuable resource for the professional or serious amateur ornithologist as well as those with a passing interest in the birds around them. Its user-friendly format and informative species accounts provides an extensive introduction to the Australian avifauna that should develop the knowledge of most readers, no matter what their experience. The role that this book continues to have in engaging people to take an interest in Australian birds cannot be underestimated, and its importance is often reflected in it being one of the select few books on Australian birds that is widely available to the general public.

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