

corrected) by reference to *HANZAB*. I hesitate to criticise an amateur's life-long labour of love, but amateur needn't mean scientifically inaccurate. Egg enthusiasts would do well to read some basic ornithology or ecology.

Beruldsen, G. (1980). 'A Field Guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds'. (Rigby: Adelaide.)

Christidis, L. and Boles, W. E. (1994). 'The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories'. RAOU Monograph 2. (Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union: Melbourne.)

Debus, S. 1984. Breeding seasons of raptors. *Australasian Raptor Association News* 5: 70-71.

Olsen, P. (1995). 'Australian Birds of Prey'. (University of New South Wales Press: Sydney.)

Olsen, P. D. and Marples, T. G. (1993). Geographic variation in egg size, clutch size and date of laying of Australian raptors (Falconiformes and Strigiformes). *Emu* 93: 167-179.

Schodde, R. and Mason, I. J. (1999). 'The Directory of Australian Birds: Passerines'. (CSIRO: Melbourne.)

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## BOOK REVIEW

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### **Hérons, Egrets and Bitterns: Their biology and conservation in Australia**

Neil McKilligan. 2005. Australian Natural History Series, CSIRO Publishing. Paperback, 133 Pp., colour illustrations. ISBN 0643091335. \$34.95 plus postage.

*Hérons, Egrets and Bitterns* is the result of Neil McKilligan's long-standing interest in the Australian members of the Ardeidae. For decades, the author has undertaken research into the population dynamics of the Cattle Egret in south-east Queensland, and his intimate knowledge of Australia's herons (a term the author uses for all members of the Family Ardeidae) is evident throughout the book.

Chapters 1 and 2 present a worldwide overview of the Family Ardeidae, including discussions of the origin and taxonomy of the family, their characteristics and identification. Chapter 3 provides only the briefest discussion of the importance of herons, including their use as bioindicators and some species' pest status in the aquaculture industry. Subsequent chapters focus on Australian herons beginning with 'Distribution, movements and longevity' (Chapter 4), which draws heavily upon bird banding data and is a particularly interesting read. Chapter 5 looks at the food resources and foraging ecology of our herons, and Chapter 6 discusses the breeding biology. Chapter 7, 'Population numbers and conservation', although slightly biased towards the colonial members of this family, provides information on the conservation status and regional abundance of herons in Australia. The final chapters describe each of Australia's ten day herons (subfamily Ardeinae), the Nankeen Night Heron (subfamily Nyctocoracinae) and the three bitterns (subfamily Botaurinae), and there are brief descriptions of species, which have occasionally been recorded in Australia.

The book is peppered with 'information boxes' that provide brief and informative dialogue on general biological topics, such as 'taxonomy and classification' and 'feather structure', as they arise throughout the course of the book. Black and white photographs are provided throughout and eight pages of colour photographs form a photographic guide to all of Australia's herons. There are thumbnail sketches of each species in Chapter 8, and the distribution maps also show locations of breeding.

The book does not delve as deeply into the biology of night herons and bitterns as it does with the day herons, and there is far more information on the Cattle Egret in the species account section than of other members of the family. Although the author attributes this to the abundance of information available on the day species and the Cattle Egret in particular, I would have liked to see more biological information presented in the species account section. The reference list is comprehensive and it is presented in an alphabetical format rather than by chapter.

Apart from a few typographical errors and some mistakes in the formatting of the reference list, the book appears free of editorial errors. Although it contains a wealth of information, the small paperback format, simple layout and clear language make this book an easy and enjoyable read. It is aimed squarely at students and amateur bird watchers, but will make fascinating reading to all who are interested in these elegant Australian waterbirds. McKilligan's work is an easy to read, succinct, informative and timely text, which is a worthy addition to Australian ornithological literature.

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