

justified. The Perth Zoo colony is the only remaining Great Egret colony in the Perth metropolitan region and is threatened by both development on the zoo grounds and by loss and degradation of the egret's foraging habitat. An accurate count was therefore necessary to establish a baseline against which long-term numbers could be measured. Previous counts (Jaensch and Vervest 1989) had been done from the ground, but their accuracy could not be judged. The cherry picker counts, although causing several deaths, have allowed the accuracy of ground counts carried out in the same season to be estimated. Long-term monitoring of this colony can therefore be continued from the ground. Based on our experience, a cherry picker should only be used in heronries when other census methods are not possible or where standardization of procedures is significantly important (as at the Perth Zoo) to justify possible losses of chicks.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Best of Australian Birds.

Dave Watts, 1999. New Holland Publishers, Australia. RRP \$29.95.

This publication comprises a collection of over 170 species of Australian birds as photographed by Dave Watts. It is essentially a 'coffee-table' style book, showcasing his exceptional photographic talents accompanied by a limited amount of text throughout. The images themselves are divided into sections which are habitat-based, encompassing Wetlands, Coasts and Islands, Forests, Woodlands and Plains, and finally the Arid Centre.

Whilst the text is principally superficial, skimming briefly from one group of birds to another leaving snippets of information along the way, there are however a few gems of Dave Watts' personal observations recounted that make the text worthwhile and provide a small insight into what it takes to be a true wildlife photographer (as opposed to a frequenter of wildlife parks and zoos). In one such instance he recalls staking out a waterhole among the gibber plains, well before sunrise. As a male Emu and its six chicks approached for a drink, a Wedge-tailed Eagle swooped in low, scattering the chicks but was unsuccessful in its attack. Now if only there were photos! Perhaps more of these anecdotes and less of the 'skimming' would have complimented the images to greater effect.

The photos that are published speak for themselves, as I suspect is the very intention of the book. The irony here is that the very people who will truly appreciate just how superb some of the shots are, will also be craving a lot more information as to how they were achieved. David Holland's books on Australian Raptors, Owls, and most recently Kingfishers where he combines his wonderful photographs with personal

essays so successfully comes to mind as an example of just how this book could have been developed. Never the less, Dave Watts' bird photographs combine a technical and artistic excellence and it is a great pleasure to see so many reproduced, and with such obvious care in the printing. Whilst pin-sharp focus may be an important ingredient in a 'successful' shot, the creative elements of composition, use of light, and capturing that intangible 'jizz' of each bird are what must be combined to produce truly memorable images.

My personal favourites here are the evocative, atmospheric group studies of Banded Stilts and a mixed flock of Grey-tailed Tattlers and Bar-tailed Godwits, both of them captured as if in perpetual motion, as indeed they so often are! The other portraits that seem to leap from the page are where Watts has cleverly used natural backlighting, typically early morning or late afternoon, to highlight the subject against the background. In this style we have magnificent studies of a Princess Parrot, a Wedge-tailed Eagle, a Nankeen Night Heron, and some Emu chicks. Disappointingly, there is only one image (superb though it is) of the rare Orange-bellied Parrot for which Dave Watts is perhaps best known. This is contrary to the jacket introduction informing us that several personal favourites of this species had been included.

Finally, I find the title 'The Best of Australian Birds' somewhat trite and unfortunate. Work of this quality deserves a far more specific, individual title than the commercially generic 'The Best of...'. Whilst this style of publication will no doubt appeal to a wide audience, I feel due recognition of Dave Watts' efforts and achievements is somewhat diluted here.

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