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BOOK REVIEW

Field Guide to the Birds of Australia. Ken Simpson and Nicolas Day. Penguin Books Australia Ltd. Melbourne, 1996. 400 pages, 131 colour plates, \$35.00.

Most bird watchers have a preference for one of the three main field guides available for Australian birds. One of the guides has accurate illustrations, concise text and is a convenient size for carrying in a pocket. Another guide has adopted a different approach with small illustrations, extensive text with detailed descriptions of plumage and distribution but it is too large to conveniently carry in a pocket.

Simpson and Day's guide falls somewhere in between. The illustrations in all editions have been excellent and had adequate text but it also was too large to carry in the pocket. However, for bird banders who tend to have different requirements of field guides to bird observers, Simpson and Day is valuable because of the size and quality of the plates as well as often including illustrations of juveniles.

This new edition, the fifth, is the first of the field guides to incorporate the new arrangement of birds as detailed in *The taxonomy and species of birds of Australia and its territories* by Christidis and Boles (1994). Most of the original plates are retained but there are nineteen new plates. Some of the existing plates are modified to show where changes in family relationships have occurred. For example, the Plains Wanderer is now included with the waders but is retained in the plate illustrating quail. This sometimes detracts from the appearance of individual plates and suggests that aesthetics were sacrificed for expediency, to ensure this was the first field guide to contain the new taxonomic arrangement. Of concern in the copy that I reviewed was the colour balance of many of

the plates. There was an almost fluorescent glow to the greens and yellows in many of the plates including the orioles and the yellow breasted boatbill. I hope this was just an early production problem and has been corrected in later printings.

The species accounts include a coding system for the abundance of each species. On each of the distribution maps breeding and non-breeding areas are marked; unfortunately these maps are very small and are inadequate for defining the range of the species in the absence of supporting text. At the end of the main section three pages are devoted to rare birds that have been accepted as valid records for Australia. The back of the guide incorporates a summary of the characteristics of each family group of birds and the breeding season of most species. Also included is a concise explanation on the DNA-DNA hybridization technique and how it has changed our understanding of the relationship of many of the world's bird families.

Overall this edition maintains the high standard of previous editions and has the advantage of incorporating the new taxonomic sequence for Australian birds. For those already with a copy of Christidis and Boles (1994) the main value of this fifth edition lies in its new illustrations particularly of juveniles, e.g. the woodswallows. This new edition is unlikely to change your allegiance from one of the alternative guides but birders purchasing their first field guide should find it very satisfactory.

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