

hastened by the advent of the camera and photographic images. However, Olsen points out that there were still a few notable Australian bird artists in the early part of the twentieth century, among whom Neville William Cayley is perhaps best known. Cayley wrote and illustrated several bird books, most famously *What bird is that* (1931), the first field guide to Australian birds. Olsen remarks that the illustrations in this book were small, basic and poorly reproduced, but the book was hugely popular and a best-seller for many decades.

After a brief renaissance in Australian bird art marked by the production of several lavish tomes on specialist topics full of superb illustrations (such as those by Cooper, Trusler and O'Grady) in the 1960s and 70s, field guides and handbooks became the main art-illustrated bird books from the 1980s onwards. Notable among the suite of field guides published in this period were the landmark contributions of Slater (1970 and 1974), Pizzey and Doyle (1980), Simpson and Day (1984) and, most recently, Menkhorst et al. (2017). Olsen points out that the field guide artist's exacting task is to distil and accurately represent the essential features that distinguish one species from another, sometimes in flight if this when the birds are most often observed. The pre-eminent handbook on Australian birds is *The Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, which was published in seven volumes from 1990 to 2006. As well as summarising all that was known about the bird species' natural history at the time, this monolithic work contains illustrations of all the species described that were contributed by a talented suite of artists.

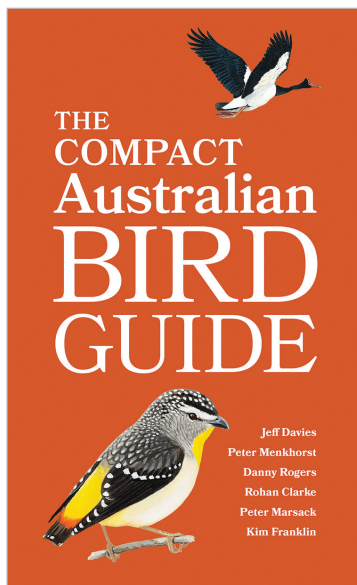
The final two chapters in Olsen's book provide brief summaries of the lives and art of four recent Australian bird artists (Robert Ulmann, Lars Knudsen, William T. Cooper

and Peter Slater) and 52 contemporary ones. Obviously it is impossible to do justice to all these vignettes here and I will mention just two. Peter Slater, with whom most Corella readers will be familiar, illustrated more than 20 books on birds and reckoned that he illustrated every Australian bird species at least four times! He trained as a teacher and started his artistic life as a bird photographer. Olsen tells us that he had no formal artistic training and painted from recollection and direct observation, mainly in acrylic. He is perhaps best known for *The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds*. Nicholas Day was born in England and at the age of ten migrated to Australia. He spent three years as a birdkeeper at Melbourne Zoo before becoming a full-time artist. Day illustrated all the birds in Ken Simpson's *The Birds of Australia* (1984) and contributed to Chris Doughty's *The Birds of The Solomons, Vanuatu and New Caledonia*. Later he worked as a ranger at the Phillip Island Penguin Parade before establishing a new studio in 2020.

Olsen's book is meticulously researched, very well written and stunningly illustrated. I particularly like the fact that many of the illustrations are accompanied by a short description of the work (title, size, medium, provenance and a little interesting background) that supplements rather than repeats the content of the main text. I found very little to criticise about this publication, except perhaps that the historical temporal organisation is a little awkward in a couple of places, resulting in some repetition e.g. on the Goulds' contributions and Slater's field guides. Most amateur and professional ornithologists will find this book fascinating reading, even if they are not particularly artistically inclined. Those who are so inclined will find it an invaluable source of information about the history of Australian bird art.

Alan Lill

## Book Review



**The Compact Australian Bird Guide.** Jeff Davies, Peter Menkhorst, Danny Rogers, Rohan Clarke, Peter Marsack and Kim Franklin 2022. CSIRO Publishing. Soft cover. 264 pp., coloured illustrations. ISBN: 9781486312245. RRP AU \$34.99.

This publication is a compact edition of the very popular *The Australian Bird Guide*, which is arguably the premier field guide now used to identify Australian birds and was originally published in 2017, with a revised edition in 2019.

As suggested by its title, the new book is a much smaller and lighter version of its predecessor, so it is particularly well suited to be a "carry-around" field guide. It includes over 700 accounts of species that reside in, or are regular visitors to mainland Australia, Tasmania and surrounding coastal waters.

This compact version uses most of the illustrations from its bigger predecessor but at a slightly smaller scale, and it does not repeat the extensive text from the original guide. However, the text accompanying each of the species illustrations has been carefully written to provide essential basic information on plumage, size, voice and habitat that enhances fast and accurate identification. Unlike the layout in the original publication, the text and distribution maps are positioned on the same page as the illustrations.

Given its size, the *Compact Australian Bird Guide* will be far more suitable for use as an identification aid in the field than its bigger 'cousin', which is more suited to the role of a reference book that is safely housed at home.

Jeff Hardy