

BOOK REVIEW

A Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife: The Birds and Mammals of the Antarctic Continent and Southern Ocean, by Hadoram Shirihai. 2002. Alula Press, Helsinki, Finland. 510 pages, 35 color plates by Brett Jarrett, 600 color photos. Hardback, 59.90 euros (about \$60 US). ISBN 951-98947-0-5.

Antarctica and the southern seas are among the last true wildernesses on Earth. Few are lucky enough to visit these areas, and, until now, no single guide has covered their wildlife in a modern format. For readers of *Western Birds* this book's main interest lies in the treatment of southern seabirds that have occurred, or could occur, in North American waters: 106 pages, 9 color plates, and 126 color photos (84 of albatrosses) are devoted to the Procellariiformes.

The book starts with lengthy acknowledgments, a review of the area covered (the Antarctic continent north to the Subtropical Convergence or latitude 40° S), and a summary of Antarctic exploration. Then follow species accounts for birds, seals, and cetaceans, descriptions of subdivisions within the region and of adjacent areas (so-called "gateways" to the Antarctic, such as Tierra del Fuego), a bibliography, and an index. The species accounts include color plates (with birds not necessarily to scale, e.g., Plate 8), color maps, a description (including sections on voice, size, and similar species), and notes on distribution, biology, conservation, and taxonomy. Good-quality photos are included for many species, usually with date, location, and comments about identification. Photos are unnumbered and so are unreferenced in the text. The book is tastefully designed and produced on high-quality glossy paper.

I will restrict this review largely to its potential interest for North American readers, who might turn first to the Shy Albatross taxa in hope of enlightenment. The text is responsibly conservative about problems inherent in separating adult Shy (*Thalassarche* [c.] *cauta*) and White-capped (*T.* [c.] *steadii*) albatrosses at sea but supports the identification of the 1999 California adult as nominate *cauta* (Cole 2000). Nothing new is added about the separation of immatures, including Salvin's and Chatham albatrosses. For the Wandering Albatross group, Shirihai states clearly that his treatment is provisional and that albatross taxonomy is in a state of flux. This recognition of a dynamic situation, rather than forcing things into a rigid framework, is commendable. *Seventeen* pages then tell us that three of the five Wandering Albatross taxa are not safely identifiable at sea—unless the age and sex (and in some cases breeding location!) are known. Until the immature plumage stages of the nominate Wandering Albatross are understood, and perhaps even then, the at-sea identification of these ocean giants will remain conjectural at best.

The accounts for other Procellariiformes provide useful information and some great photos, such as that of a Pycroft's Petrel on p. 154. The usually brief discussions of flight behavior, structure, and similar species suggest the author is unfamiliar with several species at sea (e.g., De Filippi's Petrel, which doesn't occur in the region but is included nonetheless). Real-life identification problems are often greater than suggested; for example, the separation of bleached immature Sooty and Light-mantled Sooty albatrosses is treated superficially, and there are no photos or paintings of these confusing plumages. Some accounts rely on published (but inaccurate) sources and so do not correctly describe the juvenile Pale-faced Shearwater, for example. The color maps indicate breeding locations (helpfully identified by numbers on each map) and at-sea distributions, the latter often grouped for similar taxa (e.g., the Shy Albatross complex). At-sea distributions are mostly accurate given the limited amount of data from which one can extrapolate, although I know of no basis for the mapping of the Brown Skua off western South America.

Taxa are named on the plates, and field marks are often noted next to the figures. Many of the tubenose plates are adequate for field identification and reflect good technical skill at painting. To their detriment, however, the plates look to be based

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largely on photos rather than field sketches and critical at-sea observation. The plates suggest a lack of familiarity with avian anatomy (e.g., skuas with 11 or more primaries), reinforced by the bird-topography figure of an albatross (page 53) that erroneously features inner secondaries extending inward to the body (allegedly covered by the humerals). Plates of things other than seabirds are variably successful, but the anatomically challenged birds on Plate 22 (South Atlantic island passerines) are decidedly substandard. Most plates in my copy are deeply saturated with pigment, and in some cases (e.g., Plate 11, the Blue Petrel and prions) this reduces their usefulness for identification.

As in many other European-based works there is a bias in the bibliography, and, while the text is packed with information, few literature citations are provided. Popular European articles (e.g., on giant-petrels and skuas) are included in the bibliography, but relevant references from North America (e.g., Spear et al. 1992, Howell et al. 1996) and Australia (Eades et al. 1994) are absent—although information from some of these has been incorporated into the text. Editing slips are not rare: the maps and text may disagree (the Westland Petrel is not mapped east to South America), and references may not be in the bibliography (Jouventin et al. 1989, noted on p. 91).

Having written the above, I field-tested this book on a 19-day cruise to the Falklands, South Georgia, and the Antarctic Peninsula and saw how it worked for wildlife enthusiasts and birdwatchers with varying levels of ability. Closer scrutiny revealed that production and editing were hurried. Typos and discrepancies proved common, and deciphering some sentences was a challenge. The book is a triumph of circumlocution over concision: judicious editing could cut each species account by at least 10–20% while making it much more user-friendly, the plates are not grouped together for comparison, and the identification sections appear to have received no critical peer review. For example, there is no straightforward discussion of features distinguishing flying Wandering Albatrosses from Southern Royal Albatrosses as they are often seen at sea—not close enough for the Royal's dark tomium stripe to be seen. Or, if you think you have seen an immature South American Sea Lion, try checking the plates or "similar species" section to distinguish it from immature fur seals, a genuine concern for the non-specialist. The taxonomic status of shags in islands of the Scotia Arc was considered unresolved by Prince and Croxall (1996) but is "black-and-white" in this work (on the basis of what source?), except for disagreement between text and map for the distribution of South Georgia Shag at Shag Rocks. Taxonomic discussions for the Kelp Gull and Antarctic Tern are confused and confusing. The Pale-faced Sheathbill (p. 253) allegedly shows "limited seasonal plumage variation" (undescribed), though sheathbills have only a single molt and plumage each year (Burger 1996). The list of other such problems could fill pages.

A Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife is an ambitious undertaking that involved a considerable amount of work. Its strengths are the high-quality photos and the scope of information gathered in one place. The book's preface states the hope that "both casual visitors and scientists will find this a complete and up-to-date guide," and "one of the main emphases is ... the application of modern techniques to the identification of the region's bird [sic] and marine mammals." Casual visitors, however, will likely be overwhelmed by the density of information, and for them I recommend Soper (2000), a small, light, and user-friendly book designed for its audience. The present work fails as a scientific reference because of the virtual lack of citations; these should be included in any future edition. With perseverance, keen birdwatchers will find the book useful for identification, although in most cases a combination of Harrison (1987) and Enticott and Tipling (1997) suffices. The application of modern identification techniques in the present work falls short in many cases, as for immature albatrosses, skuas, and terns, but this is not necessarily a criticism of the author and artist. Rather, it reflects the difficulties of gaining sufficient field experience with these birds—which

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is part of the draw for many to return again and again to the wonders of the Southern Ocean.

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