

BOOK REVIEWS

The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status, by Robert L. Pyle and Peter Pyle. B. P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu. Version 1 (31 December 2009); <http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rfp-monograph>.

The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands is the magnum opus of Robert L. Pyle, the grand old man of Hawaiian birding, who passed away in 2007 at the age of 84. The monograph was started with the assistance of his family and finished by his son Peter Pyle, also a well-known birder and ornithologist. In keeping with Bob's generous spirit and his boundless encouragement of Hawaiian birding and conservation (which touched me personally when I was still in high school), the Pyles decided to publish this monograph online to maximize its availability and utility. It will also be available as a DVD from Bishop Museum Press.

The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands is essentially a very detailed checklist, an encyclopedic compendium of all historically known birds of Hawai'i: native breeding species, migrants, accidental, introduced (both successful and non-established) and hypothetical. With the exception of the extinct species known only from fossil and subfossil remains (though some are mentioned in conjunction with the main accounts), if it had feathers, it's in here. Species accounts, as downloadable pdf files, cover the history (e.g., notable collections and number of specimens), historical occurrence, and current status and distribution of each species.

Many species are also illustrated by the Hawaii Rare Bird Documentary Photograph File of Bishop Museum, with links to full-sized pictures. These illustrate principally migrants and vagrants rather than endemic species, although there are a few notable exceptions, such as the poignant photographs of the now extinct Kaua'i 'O'o and 'O'u. As many of the photographs are primarily documentary (of birds both live in the field and collected specimens), they vary in quality, but some are gorgeous. More photographs of native birds are expected to be added, which will be a welcome addition.

Additional features include analyses and graphs of long-term population trends from Christmas Bird Counts, an exhaustive and fascinating compendium of synonymies, an extensive list of literature, and a list of relevant links. The CBC data are an especially useful resource—I found some species' trends to be quite disturbing.

I found the species accounts to be highly detailed, interesting, informative, readable, and accurate. Although I consider myself well read in the old literature and the history of Hawaiian birds, I learned something from nearly every account. The authors have tackled the problem of sightings of rare birds (particularly difficult with species on the brink of extinction, which rarely get photographed) with both vigor and rigor. I may disagree with some of their decisions on which observations to accept, mostly in the period between the end of major collecting at the turn of the 20th century and about 1950 (e.g., with the O'ahu 'Akialoa), but by and large I think they made the right conclusions, particularly with many recent "sightings," few of which seem to be replicable.

I found only one major error: the authors state that the Maui 'Alauahio "gradually disappeared from the crater and more accessible areas (other than upper Kipahulu Valley) of Haleakala National Park during the 1960s–1970s." However, Hosmer Grove, location of the national park's campground and picnic area near its headquarters, still has a thriving population of the Maui 'Alauahio, while upper Kipahulu Valley is accessible only by a rugged two-day hike, and permission to enter this fragile area is granted only to scientific researchers.

Inevitably, some typographical errors have crept into the monograph (e.g., 'Oma'o incorrectly spelled Oma'o or even O'mao, and a few place names are misspelled). I found rather more typos than in most books, but these should be easy to correct, given the monograph's electronic format.

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The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the Hawaiian avifauna. It is a great complement to the field guides that may pique the reader's interest to learn more. I highly recommend visiting the website and exploring it at one's leisure. The online publication is, in my opinion, ideal for this work. It will only improve even more as further photographs and new research are added in the future—Version 2 is expected between 2011 and 2013. Until then, Version 1 is to remain unchanged (except for corrections) so that it can be cited in the same way as printed scientific literature.

My only disappointment is that Bob did not live to see this project completed; I am sure he would have been pleased by the end result.

A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Hawai'i: the Main Islands and Offshore Waters, by Jim Denny. 2010. University of Hawai'i Press. 222 pages, over 200 color photographs. Softback, \$19.99. ISBN 978-0-8248-3383-1.

Hawaii is high on most birdwatchers' lists of places to visit. Birders come both for the spectacular radiation of its endemic land birds—in particular, the Hawaiian honeycreepers, for which it is justly famous—and for its wide assortment of tropical seabirds and introduced species from around the world. Beyond exciting birds, the Aloha State offers abundant scenic and cultural attractions that nonbirding family members will enjoy.

The goal of *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Hawai'i* is to illustrate the species an observer is at all likely to encounter in the main islands. Along with the resident and migrant species, the book also includes accidental species only rarely encountered in Hawai'i. It does not include species believed to be extinct, vagrants that have shown up only once or twice, nor species found only in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands, most of which are restricted to authorized researchers (although limited and expensive ecotourism has returned to Midway Atoll).

As implied by the title, the heart of the book is the pictures. Nearly all species are illustrated with large photographs by two of Hawai'i's premier avian photographers, Jim Denny and Jack Jeffrey, while excellent pictures by other photographers cover the few remaining species. There isn't a dud in the entire book; I found the frontispiece of an 'Iwi in a flowering mamane to be an especially exquisite composition. In addition, there are pictures of habitat and good birding locales.

The species are separated into urban, country, forest, wetland and seabirds, a system that works well. Each species is given a full page, with large easy-to-read type that older eyes will appreciate. All the Hawaiian birds and place names are spelled with the proper orthography, with macrons and glottal stops, which I appreciate, but which may at first look odd to visitors. The engaging text is colloquial rather than technical, and descriptions are brief and to the point rather than tediously detailed. Background information on behavior and habits is given, as well as local lore and good places to look for each species. I learned a few new tidbits along the way—I will leave it to the reader to find out which species is “the BVD bird”!

The book begins with a short but comprehensive introduction to the Hawaiian avifauna and its woeful history. Following the species accounts there is a comprehensive checklist and an extensive list of suggested birding localities; I could not think of any important omissions.

No book is perfect, and I found a few places where I think this work could have been improved. Although most similar species are placed on facing pages, some are not, despite being compared to each other in the text, such as the Greater and Lesser Scaups and Pectoral and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. For some accounts, I would have liked more discussion of the birds. The book mentions how, in Hawaiian mythology,

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the moorhen brought fire to mankind, but leaves out how it scorched its forehead in the process, giving it the red shield (*'alae 'ula*) that distinguishes it from the coot. For some of the migrants, the text is so brief that there is a large gap between it and the picture. For example, for the Tufted Duck, there is twice as much empty space as text. Perhaps more pictures could have filled that in. Most species are illustrated by a single photograph; while these are generally adequate for identification, I think the book could have benefited from showing more plumages. It also resurrects the century-old name *'Akakane* for the Hawai'i *'Akepa*, though it is used by few, if any, birders or researchers. An amusing typo calls the Puaiohi "illusive" rather than "elusive," although a few species not covered may deserve the former description. But these are minor quibbles. As a whole, the book does an admirable job of presenting each species. Factual errors are very few—one is an incorrect conversion of 2500 miles to 5025 kilometers (should be 4025) in the introduction.

This book tries to fill the niche between the Hawai'i Audubon Society's *Hawaii's Birds* and Pratt, Bruner, and Berrett's *Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific*. Each has its own strength. In the case of *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Hawaii*, comprehensive scope is combined with easy-to-read, interesting text and large portraits. While the others may be more detailed, this is the book I pulled out when a colleague asked me about birds seen during a recent conference in Hawai'i.

A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Hawaii is an accessible book that is perhaps aimed more to the recreational birder who wants to identify what he or she sees rather than to hard-core listers. The latter will find the traditional field guides to be indispensable, but even serious birders will get much utility here. Nonbirding spouses and friends will also enjoy this beautiful book—and might even get converted.

Jaan Lepson