BOOK VIEWS

WHERE TO FIND BIRDS IN AUSTRALIA by John Bransbury. 1987. Melbourne, Victoria: Century Hutchinson Australia Pty. Ltd. xvi + 539 pages; 16 pages of color photos, 106 maps, 12-page bibliography; paperback \$35.

I am just back from my first trip to Australia, and I want to express my thanks to John Bransbury for his very thorough guide to Australia's outstanding birdwatching spots. Being a bookseller and nature tour guide, I am supposed to be current on this sort of book, but when I stepped off the plane in Cairns, all I had to go on were a couple of itineraries from bird tours and fifteen pages of photocopied bird lists. Fortunately, Cairns is blessed with two great bookstores, and so I found myself a short while later with Bransbury's guide clutched in one hand and the keys to my rental car jangling in the other. Three weeks and 350 birds later, I was grateful my first stop in Australia had been the local bookseller.

Where to Find Birds in Australia has all the right ingredients for a firstclass bird-finding guide. The maps are large, clearly delineated, and numerous. Information on birds of particular interest to visiting naturalists, including both rare and common species, is blended remarkably well with various notes on geology, botany, and other natural history interests. Accounts are often spiced with historical matters, as well as precautionary words on biting insects (very few), potential weather risks, and trail conditions. A nice touch, and one which is all too often missing from this genre, is information on the suitability of certain tracks for the handicapped. Directions, for the most part, are clear, although those to Sherbrooke Park leave something to be desired. Still I did manage to find the Superb Lyrebird. Each state has its own chapter, introduced with a short list of useful addresses for the bird finder. The total pages of the text for each state is as follows: Victoria, 74; New South Wales, 70; Australian Capital Territory, 14; Queensland, 96; Tasmania, 44; South Australia, 56; Western Australia, 102; and Northern Territory, 40. My only real gripe with this book is its price, which at \$35 (even Australian dollars) is excessive for a paperback. It is widely available in Australia.

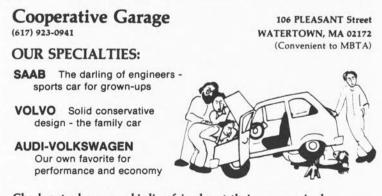
THE SLATER FIELD GUIDE TO AUSTRALIAN BIRDS by Peter, Pat, and Raoul Slater. 1986. Willoughby, New South Wales: Lansdowne-Rigby Publishers. 343 pages, 157 color plates, maps; paperback \$29.95.

"At last," it says on the book's back cover, "Australia has a truly portable field guide to all known bird species throughout the country." Not being a student of the history of Australian bird literature, I cannot speak to the "at last" issue, but I

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can say that this guidebook is indeed truly portable--it will fit in the pocket of your jeans--and does cover all of Australia's birds, including the vagrants. The Slater gang does not waste any words in this book. There is a four-page introduction, and then you plunge right into the species accounts and plates. The color plates are superb, and, in my estimation, are the main selling point of the book. Peter Slater is a splendid artist, and his representations of Australian birds are the best available today. The plates tend not to be crowded, and Slater has taken pains to depict recognizable color phases and subspecies of many families. including parrots, owls, cuckoo-shrikes, warblers, thornbills, and pardalotes. The only plates that are not particularly good are a series of halftone, doublepage pictures of birds in flight. The birds depicted suffer from poor contrast with the dark backgrounds, and sadly, represent many of the species most in need of clear, in-flight illustrations such as various seabirds, birds of prey, and shorebirds. The text is concise, ranging from five to fifteen lines, and discusses field marks of adults and immatures, voice, nesting, and range. Small black-andwhite maps accompany the text, and both are directly across from the appropriate color plate. The text is much less exhaustive than that of the other standard Australian bird guide, Graham Pizzey's A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia, and the binding is poor. The cover of my copy began to come loose after about six days of field use. Nonetheless, Slater's field guide is a better bet in the field, both for its much better illustrations and for its compactness. It is available in most Australian bookstores. (I would have brought back a dozen copies, but I had to use my money on souvenirs for my kids!)

BRIAN CASSIE leads nature tours to various destinations in North America and beyond. He is also a coordinator of the Massachusetts Butterfly Atlas Project.



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