

SHOREBIRDS OF AUSTRALIA

Geering, A., Agnew, L. & Harding, S. (Eds). 2007. Canberra, Australia: CSIRO Publishing. 256 pp. with colour photographs and distribution maps. Soft cover. ISBN 978-0-643092-26-6. AU\$49.95.

A book on the shorebirds (waders) of Australia is well overdue, given that the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) has been researching shorebirds for more than 27 years, and the last book on the topic was *Shorebirds in Australia* (Lane & Davies 1987). Much has been learnt about shorebirds since 1987.

Shorebirds of Australia is well laid out and comprehensible to novice and expert alike. It reflects the current status of shorebirds and studies concerning them in Australia. The sections of the book are comprehensive and include breeding ecology (from Arctic tundra to Australian endemics), migration studies, plumages and topography, species descriptions and the threats to shorebirds, and conservation actions. Section authors include some of the world experts in shorebird research. The book contains a wealth of information and also clearly points out the lack of knowledge concerning some of the Australian endemics, the flyways of its migratory species, and the reasons that populations of some shorebirds are in steep decline.

Chapter 1 adequately covers the evolutionary history and taxonomy of shorebirds.

Chapter 2 (breeding ecology) provides a stark contrast between the Arctic breeders that visit Australia (Pavel Tomkovich) and the largely endemic Australian nesting birds (Mike Weston). The chapter is well laid out and beautifully illustrated, and it provides details not readily available elsewhere.

Chapter 3 (migration) showcases the knowledge and expertise of authors Phil Battley and Danny Rogers. The chapter provides a lot of new information stemming mainly from a huge effort by researchers (both amateur and professional) in the Asia Pacific Flyways, especially the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. It covers migration routes, staging areas and distances travelled. Battley's speculation that the Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica baueri* flies non-stop between Alaska and Australia or New Zealand, a distance of 11 000 km, was borne out by satellite telemetry, as witnessed by the shorebirding community on the Internet, while the book was at the printer's!

Chapter 4 (feeding ecology and habitat selection) is well written, with some new findings, but it is short on content. This lack is not so much the fault of the author (Paul Finn), but a reflection of the lack of financial support for research in this field in Australia, as compared with Europe or North America.

Chapter 5 (plumages and topography) by Danny and Annie Rogers is covered in a simple and easy to understand form. Their approach

should encourage those of us who give up in despair at differentiating one drab non-breeding shorebird from the other. It includes tips on differentiating species, and even age and sex differences!

Chapter 6 (species descriptions) is accompanied by excellent photographs and detailed distribution maps showing core shorebird sites in Australia. It includes up-to-date information on vagrants that seem to be turning up with increasing regularity. (Or is it that birders in Australia are taking a keener interest in shorebirds?) The average reader will find this section readable and easy on the eye, even though it includes little information that isn't available elsewhere. However, because of the obvious threats to migratory species, clearly stated elsewhere in the book, small distribution maps illustrating migration routes (and question marks where little or no knowledge is available) would have provided a better picture for readers interested in global conservation of shorebirds.

Chapter 7 (threats to shorebirds and conservation actions) covers the reasons for the obvious decline in some shorebird populations both globally and locally. These threats include damming and water extraction from rivers and loss of wetland habitat, particularly in the region of the Yellow Sea coasts of China and Korea. The chapter ends with tips for individuals who want to help with shorebird conservation and with links to relevant groups. Although decline in the numbers of some shorebird species, some of which don't occur in Australia, is discussed, there is little mention (other than locally in South Australia) of the serious decline of some species in Australia. For example, the Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* has declined by up to 80% in southeast Australia over the past 20 years (annual shorebird counts published in the AWSG journal, *Stilt*), most likely because of habitat threats in the flyways.

A pleasing aspect of *Shorebirds of Australia* is the flow of reading, which is uninterrupted because of the use of reference numbers instead of the annoyingly repetitive strings of authors and dates that appear in scientific publications. The book summarises what is known about shorebirds of the region, and the gaps in that knowledge; it is easy reading, a valuable source of information for birdwatchers, students and researchers, and good value for money.

REFERENCE

LANE, B.A. & DAVIES, J.N. 1987. Shorebirds in Australia. Melbourne, Australia: Nelson Publishers.

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