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In this issue: Osprey and White-bellied Sea-Eagle populations in
South Australia
Birds of Para Wirra Recreation Park
Bird report 2009

Book Reviews

Parrots of The World

JOSEPH M. FORSHAW AND FRANK KNIGHT 2010.

CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria. A\$39.95. Paperback with 336 pages, 146 colour plates, 375 maps.

Joseph Forshaw can justifiably be called the original keeper of the flame when it comes to having collated knowledge of the natural history of parrots generally and the “biographies” of individual species. His landmark *Australian Parrots* (Landsdowne, 1969) and *Parrots of the World* (Landsdowne, 1973), the latter illustrated by William T. Cooper, fuelled a revolution in scientific study of parrots in the wild. Indeed, things probably long ago reached the point where no single author could hope to reasonably update the original *Parrots of the World* as a book (a website perhaps?). What Forshaw has gone on to do, however, is provide vehicles for bird observers to seek out and identify parrots in the field wherever they occur. This latest book, illustrated beautifully by Frank Knight, continues that trend. It is a more compact version of their earlier guide to the parrots of the world but this time perfectly sized for field use.

Organized geographically, the plates depict the world’s parrots in enough detail to identify all species and age and sex classes when seen under most circumstances that involve a reasonable look at a bird. Special effort has been made to illustrate over- and underwing patterns as well as shapes and silhouettes of birds in flight. Detail is shown of other parts of the plumage where appropriate such as of the heads of fig-

parrots *Cyclopsitta* spp. The text is minimal and covers identification, geographical variation, similar species, distribution and localities at which to see the birds.

Designed as a field guide, the book is part of a newer niche in the world of bird book publishing. That is, where we are now familiar with series of books on the natural history and biology of bird families of the world, this one deals with one order and primarily as a field guide. As a field guide relevant across several continents and oceans, it mirrors perhaps most closely a book such as Hayman *et al.*’s (1986) guide to shorebirds of the world.

Taxonomic quibbles in the book are mostly that: quibbles. A friendly email to the author or publishing one’s own data on a given subject are the best way to deal with most of these things. There is always something taxonomic in the publication pipeline that will quickly render a book like this slightly out-of-date. Still puzzling to me, however, and admittedly a hobby-horse, but of interest to Australian readers is the author’s evident reluctance to treat the Cloncurry Parrot as a subspecies of the *Barnardius zonarius*, i.e., as *B. z. macgillivrayi*, instead of as a subspecies of the Mallee Ringneck *B. barnardi*. It’s not as thorny an issue as that of whether Eastern and Pale-headed Rosellas should be conspecific, I suggest, if only because there are more published data (see summary in book review in *Emu* (2007, 107: 74-75). If two species, not one, are to be recognized for the ringneck parrots, then the ball is more and more in the court of those who defend treatment of *macgillivrayi* as a subspecies of *B. barnardi* to explain why that makes evolutionary sense and why *macgillivrayi* should *not* be a form of *B. zonarius*. Parenthetically, I add that

all ringneck parrots have a frontal band – its presence or absence often being used as a character. Only the Mallee Ringneck and south-western Australian form of *B. zonarius* have it plainly differentiated from the rest of the head, at least in our visible spectrum, and so visible in the field. Close examination of a Port Lincoln Parrot specimen will show that its frontal band is of a black that is darker than the black of the rest of the head. Similarly, the green of a Cloncurry Parrot's frontal band differs, albeit slightly, from the crown when examined closely. All enthusiasts of parrots, whether focussed on the birds' biology or spectacular diversity, will be glad to have this book. It is well-priced and so is great value. In a review I wrote a few years ago of this book's predecessor, I suggested that the parrots of the world could rest easy knowing that their biographies have been in the capable hands of Joseph Forshaw. I could add that they can also rest easy knowing that Frank Knight has now illustrated them in at least two books if not more for some species. Again, though, I hope that obituaries of the world's parrots will not need to be written by this team of writer and illustrator in any number soon, and preferably never.

Leo Joseph

*Australian National Wildlife Collection, CSIRO
Ecosystem Sciences, Canberra.*

Invisible connections: Why migrating shorebirds need the Yellow Sea

JAN VAN DE KAM, PHIL BATTLE, BRIAN McCAFFERY, DANNY ROGERS, JAE-SANG HONG, NIAL MOORES, JU YUNG-KI, JAN LEWIS & THEUNIS PIERSMA 2010.

*CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria. A\$49.95.
Paperback with 160 pages, 240 colour photographs.*

Everyone is aware that China and other Asian nations, particularly Korea, have experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth over the past 30 years. One of the advantages of this development is that in most cases the pressure to trap migrant birds for food is diminished. On the other hand the economic pressure for development has placed many coastal mudflats and wetlands along the Australasian flyway under threat. The Yellow Sea is at the epicentre of this clash between the pressure for economic development and the needs of migratory waders on the Australasian flyway. This book sets out to highlight the particular threats and challenges facing migrant waders along the mudflats of the Yellow Sea.

To that end the book is divided into eight chapters dealing with all aspects of the flyway from the breeding grounds on the tundra of the Arctic Circle, the threats and challenges facing waders on the flyway and the threats faced while on their 'summer holidays' in Australia and New Zealand. The intention is to highlight that time is running out for the travellers on the flyway as economic development pressures gobble up more mudflats and wetlands for housing, factories and golf courses. As the loss of the mudflats at Saegmangeum in Korea illustrates only too well, when it comes to economic development, migrant waders come at the end of the queue. It is now obvious that

even international treaties carry little weight when it comes to competing economic interests.

To counter the pressure coming from developers the authors of this book, researchers from along the flyway, set out to show what an extraordinary jewel the Australasian flyway is. The aim is to educate the Asian public in particular about the long-term cost of impairment or loss of the flyway. Raising public awareness about the flyway and the exquisite waders that use it will play an essential role in preserving it for future generations. In that respect the publishers have done a remarkable job of assembling an impressive team of researchers to explain all aspects of the ecology and mechanics of the flyway. The technical discussions are then complemented by the most stunning set of wader photographs by Jan van de Kam that I have ever seen. In particular the photographs of many familiar species in full breeding plumage should drive home to even the most philistine of developers what will be lost if uncontrolled reclamation of mudflats and coastal wetlands proceeds at its present pace.

The photographs alone make this a must buy for any shorebird watcher. In particular, photographs of such rarities as Spoon-billed Sandpiper in breeding plumage are absolutely stunning and may well represent the only view of this rapidly disappearing species that most birdwatchers will get. This is a species that could well be lost in our lifetime.

Despite the serious level at which most of the material is pitched the primary objective of the book is to educate the broader public about the threats to the flyway through the Yellow Sea and the migrant waders that use it. Although aimed largely at an Asian audience there are elements of this message of interest to Australians as the development threat is no less real here. In particular threats to saltfields, such as Dry Creek near Adelaide, have intensified in recent years so the need to educate politicians and the wider

general public about the wonder that is the Australasian flyway is as urgent in Australia as it is in Asia.

This book does an excellent job of getting that message across to the general public so I would recommend that we all make the effort to purchase a copy to provide as birthday or Christmas gifts to friends and family. Although it contains a wealth of scientific data it would make an excellent addition to the coffee table where it would highlight the exquisitely beautiful birds and the threats they face on the Australasian flyway.

Colin Rogers
6 Flavel Avenue
Woodforde
Adelaide.
colin.rogers@adelaide.edu.au

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Front cover photograph:
Eastern Osprey
Andrew Brooks

