

Book Review

***Shorebirds of Australia*. Edited by Andrew D.W. Geering, Lindsay Agnew and Sandra B. Harding 2007. Published by CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne. 242 pages, paperback, ISBN-978-0-643092-26-6. AU\$49.95. (Can be purchased online from <http://www.publish.csiro.au/pid/5345.htm>).**

One-third (78) of the world's species of shorebird have been recorded in Australia, with the shores of NW Australia (Broome and 80 Mile Beach) probably having the most diverse range of species (50) in the world, as well as very large numbers (about ¾ million). Australia has also been significant in world terms in shorebird research during the last 30 years and has been at the forefront of banding and population studies in the East Asian/Australasian flyway. It is very appropriate therefore that a new book, *Shorebirds of Australia*, should be published, the first dedicated to waders in Australia for 20 years.

The book provides a much-needed and comprehensive updated picture of what is currently known about Australia's resident waders and the migratory wader species which spend the non-breeding season there during each Northern Hemisphere winter. It is edited by three members of the Queensland Wader Study Group, who started out with the intention of the book being mainly about the waders of Moreton Bay, near Brisbane in SE Queensland. By widening its scope and using a total of ten authors (three from outside Australia) it has now become a book which will be valuable to everyone interested in waders both throughout Australia and overseas.

The seven chapters cover all aspects of wader ecology. Valuably, it starts with *Evolutionary History and Taxonomy*, a well-researched and up-to-date background to the current classification of shorebirds worldwide. This is followed by *Breeding Ecology*, with particular reference to the way that Australian resident species have adapted to the wide range of habitats and climatological conditions of the Continent. There is then an excellent chapter on *Migration* which covers both basic knowledge of this process and specific information relating to waders which visit Australia. This is followed by an informative chapter on *Feeding Ecology and Habitat Selection*, a most important area since food availability is the basis for wader distribution and for the evolution of migratory paths, as well as overall population levels. The next chapter is a useful basic guide to wader *Plumages and Topography*. In particular it explains where moult patterns of waders in Australia, particularly of the flight feathers, are sometimes different from those in waders, especially immature birds, which spend the non-breeding season (winter) in the Northern Hemisphere.

The largest section of the book, occupying 117 pages, is the *Species Descriptions*. In this chapter, the 55 species regularly occurring in Australia are covered in detail (two pages, including photographs and a map, being allocated for each species). There is also a brief paragraph on each of a further 23 shorebird species which occur in Australia less regularly. About half of the text on each species relates to identification characteristics, but there is also basic information on range, habits, habitats and numbers. Finally the last chapter considers the *Threats to Shorebirds and Conservation Actions*. This is a particularly topical subject given the major detrimental changes which are occurring in the migratory stopover locations throughout Asia. The huge reclamation of two complete estuaries at Saemangeun in South Korea is now well known

throughout the world but huge additional inter-tidal habitat losses are occurring each year all round the Yellow Sea and elsewhere in the East Asian/Australasian flyway. There is also a bibliography of 274 references.

The book contains a large number of photographs with typically three for each species in the *Species Descriptions* chapter and additional ones illustrating the earlier chapters. These are generally of a high quality and are taken by a range of photographers from both within Australia and overseas. It is a pity that the size of many photos is too small for the quality of some of them to be fully appreciated.

Inevitably in any book one finds small errors in the text and in the captions to photographs. In the latter there were also some opportunities missed for identifying the age and plumage of birds. Space has prevented the illustration of as wide a range of age/breeding condition plumages as are normally included in illustrations in an identification field guide. An unfortunate error is an out of date website reference for the Victorian Wader Study Group (p. 213). It should be: www.vicnet.net.au/~vwsg

I have two main concerns. I think too much of the book was probably allocated to the species descriptions, or more specifically too much of those was taken up in plumage and other identification related descriptions. These are already well covered in the various international wader and Australian field guides and, extremely comprehensively, in the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB)*. The second concern is the lack of specific information on the detailed distribution of each species within Australia and an easy guide to locations where each is likely to be found. The maps which had been included from the *Birds Australia Atlas* do not really give a balanced picture of the distribution. The long list of sites of "international importance" which is included does not really serve this purpose and is also significantly out of date (not the fault of the editors). It might have been better to reduce the extent of the plumage descriptions and insert a chapter describing and evaluating the principal wader habitats around Australia and giving a more quantitative picture of where each species may be located.

Overall, however, this is a first-class book which everyone interested in waders worldwide, from beginner to expert, will find interesting and valuable. It should be part of the library of all waderologists, other serious field ornithologists and bird watchers and anyone intending to observe waders in Australia.

Clive Minton

