

REVIEW

BOOKS:

Hayman P, Marchant J and Prater T. 1986. 'SHOREBIRDS. AN IDENTIFICATION GUIDE TO THE WADERS OF THE WORLD'. pp 412; 88 colour plates, numerous text diagrams. Croom Helm, London. Cost £19.95.

In my 1978 review of the B.T.O wader identification guide by Prater *et al.* in Safring News 7(2): 14-15 I said that the inclusion of colour plates would put such a book into the best-seller list. I did not realise that this was exactly what Prater and Marchant intended to do, but on a global scale, and by including Peter Hayman as the artist, they have come up with the finest bird book to be published for many years. And what a pleasure it is to be able to review a book and write a glowing report instead of listing the products of poor editing, lack of knowledge and poor literature survey. Those few adverse comments appearing here are really a message to the authors to consider when they revise the book in a few years time.

One of the biggest problems anyone has in tackling a book of such scope is to come up with a satisfactory list of species. Recent authors such as Johnsgard and Tuck have tended to lump together species that have close affinities but this was overdone. In this book the authors have moved towards the other extreme and generally speaking I am inclined to agree with them although my poor knowledge of the world's snipes precludes comment in that field.

However, I do feel that the Northern and Wattled Jacana should be retained as one species as they interbreed freely where their ranges touch and I definitely must take up arms over the separation of the St. Helena Plover as a species distinct from the Kittlitz's Plover when we are unsure whether genetic isolation has yet taken place.

Obviously the Black Stilt of New Zealand had not been genetically isolated long enough from the Blackwinged (Pied)

Stilt of Australia to maintain its specific independence and is now almost totally reabsorbed by that bird as a later invader of those islands. Yet it has been treated as a full species whilst the New Zealanders treat it as a subspecies. Taxonomy is not really my field, but one does like to know where one stands and I am perfectly happy to see the two races of the Lesser Golden Plover now treated as separate species and also for the Kentish Plover complex to be treated as three species: the parent group, our own White-fronted Plover and the Australian Red-capped Plover. At last Forbes and Three-banded Plovers are recognised overseas as individual species.

The inclusion of certain species now considered extinct may raise a few eyebrows but the authors were certainly vindicated when the Jerdon's Courser of India was rediscovered in 1986, not having been previously seen since 1900. This bird is probably most closely related to the Bronzewing Courser.

Peter Hayman has gone to town on the pictures and produced a magnificent set paying particular attention to detail. It really is nice to put a picture to those birds that one only reads about in scientific papers, this applying especially to South American species which are generally poorly depicted in the literature.

However, a few comments are necessary: on many pages some diagrams have no reference number and hence no description on the opposite page; for instance, in Plate 35 there are two pictures of Kentish Plover heads with no write-up and the flight pictures are merely lumped under 'f' with the comment that all races (you guess which is which) show a clear white wing-bar. In the flight diagrams of Kittlitz's and St. Helena Plovers a more rounded wing is shown for the former while in fact this applies to the latter bird. The Spotted Dikkop on Plate 14 (diagram 34a) is rather lacking in body but the only really poor diagrams are those of, surprisingly, the Ruff. These appear on Plate 86 with diagram 210d too heavy-billed and as an adult male on leg colour should show adult bill colouring. Diagram 210f has obviously been the product of crossbreeding with the Upland Sandpiper while 210g is too pot-bellied! But these do not detract from the overall array in which sexual, seasonal, age and racial differences are shown as well as salient features amongst species groups which are difficult to separate in the field, (e.g. heads of Pectoral, Sharp-tailed and the recently described Cox's Sandpipers).

Species with a world-wide distribution and several races such as the Blackwinged Stilt are well depicted, in this case with 27 separate illustrations. The illustrations are well supported on the facing page with details of salient features as well as generally accurate distribution maps in three colours depicting whether resident, a breeding or a non-breeding visitor. Some

maps will obviously call for comment but I will only mention two here; the Blackwinged Plover is shown to have a resident isolated population in the southwestern Cape whereas it has spread no further west than the Knysna region, while the southern populations of the Rock Pratincole are shown to be resident when in fact they have been recognised as breeding visitors for well over twenty years now.

The plates are lumped together as one section preceding the specific text, a format gradually becoming standardized in books of this type. The introductory chapters cover 'How to use this book'; 'How to identify waders' - this is a succinct feather-by-feather account; 'General notes on families and groups of waders'; 'Conservation of wader habitats and species' - a very important section in a time of rapidly growing world population with the concomitant destruction of habitats, and 'How to study waders' with such advice as what to do if one finds a rare or a colour-marked wader. Peter Hayman also gives advice on obtaining the correct dimensions in a bird painting both for standing and flying birds, something that all bird artists would do well to read.

The main text for the 214 species (sheathbills are omitted), covers 175 pages and gives specific detail on identification, voice, habits, movements, description, age/sex, racial variation, if any, and basic measurements as well as the major references used. Although I am unable to check references I did note one discrepancy under Greenshank in which Tree (1979) is shown in the text while under specific bibliography at the end of the book another reference (Tree 1984) is shown in this context. The short section preceding the appendix, bibliography and index, deals with separation of difficult groups such as the three golden plovers and the stint groups; here salient features are compared.

This book will remain the international waderman's bible well into the next century and I can heartily recommend it for the bookshelf whether one is an aspirant or professional wader fanatic or generally interested in bird identification or even for people who just like a nice bird book to decorate their coffee table. For me I must just save harder to get to Australasia and South America - all those plovers.....!

A.J. Tree
Chirawanoo Farm
P.O. Box 61
DARWENDALE
Zimbabwe