

Book Review

Finding Australian birds: a field guide to birding locations

TIM DOLBY AND ROHAN CLARKE. 2014

CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria. A\$49.95.
Paperback, 624 pages, numerous photographs and maps.

This is a beautifully illustrated addition to the stable of books that began with John Bransbury's *Where to find birds in Australia*. It is most similar to the second edition of Thomas and Thomas, *Birds of Australia* as both now cover all the mainland Australian States, plus the offshore islands and territories. Trips to Ashmore Reef and some contact information for pelagic trips around Australia are also covered. In a word, it provides an impressive coverage for any Australian or international birdwatchers planning a visit anywhere in Australia and its territories.

To put the book through its paces I reviewed the sections with which I am most familiar or have visited myself: South Australia and Christmas, Cocos (Keeling) and Lord Howe Islands.

It is useful to first consider the authors' advice on how to use the book. There are two target audiences: birders with general interests and birders with specific target species in mind. For those with general interests it provides lists of birds that may usually be found at many locations both in major cities and in national parks, reserves, coastlines, saltfields and wetlands. Some information is also given for non-birding family members about other attractions near the selected birding sites.

For those with specific target species in mind more specific detail in the form of mud-maps, habitat descriptions and photographs is provided.



For some species such as the Plains Wanderer this is particularly important because habitat can vary significantly over relatively short distances.

The layout of the book follows a sensible pattern with a separate section for each State. Each State is divided into birding regions with birding highlights for each. Each region is then further divided into important birding sites. South Australia is divided into two regions:

1. Adelaide and the South East and,
2. Arid Lands: the Flinders Ranges, Eyre Peninsula and the South Australian outback.

To my eye this is far too crude a division, sometimes leading to juxtaposition of sites that are widely separated, not to mention habitat differences. For example, Gluepot Reserve and other Murray Mallee locations are combined with Eyre Peninsula and the Strzelecki and Birdsville Tracks.

A larger number of regions for South Australia would facilitate planning, particularly for international visitors, as the distances between sites within each region are considerable. Restricting the Adelaide Region to Adelaide, the Mount Lofty Ranges, Dry Creek, Port Gawler, Goolwa and Kangaroo Island and treating the South East as a separate region would make more sense.

Similarly, the second region is too wide-ranging to be compatible with the sites selected. Breaking it into six areas: Arid Lands to the west of Ceduna, Flinders Ranges, the SA outback, Eyre

Peninsula, Yorke Peninsula and the Murray Mallee would align the sites selected with regions so Innes National Park on Yorke Peninsula would not be followed by Gluepot in the Murray Mallee.

On the selection of sites there is little to quibble with. They are the premier sites in SA and most SA readers will be familiar with them. The re-naming of Dublin near Thompson Beach as *Dunlin* is an amusing slip of the sort inevitable in a book written by and for birdwatchers. Other errors are more important as they may lead international visitors astray. They should be corrected in a revised edition. Examples are access to Price Saltfields, Koonchera Dune, Buckland Park Lake and pelagics from Port MacDonnell.

Price Saltfields has been closed to birdwatchers since December 2012. As visiting birders are instructed to contact Birds SA to get the latest information on access to sites, that information can fortunately be made available. Similarly, the track to Koonchera Dune has been gated and locked. Sites for Grey Grasswren are still available directly off the Birdsville Track nearby or on the Inside Track, when open.

It is implied that Buckland Park Lake is easily accessed from Port Gawler Road. Generally that is not so and a key to Dry Creek Saltfields is required. Combining these two locations and Greenfields Wetlands, Magazine Road is the way to go.

The reference to pelagic boat trips from Port MacDonnell implies that they are organised by BirdsSA. That is not the case. They are organised privately with the skipper who has the necessary commercial charter licence and insurance.

Turning to the islands, they can be divided into two types: islands to the north of Australia that attract a seemingly never-ending stream of Asian vagrants and islands in the Pacific and Southern Oceans that have breeding colonies of seabirds. Christmas and Cocos(Keeling) Islands belong in the first group and are particularly attractive destinations for those birders seeking to boost

their Australian list. They have a limited number of endemics but their main attraction is the unknown menu of Asian vagrants that may be found. For other birders both islands offer very scenic locations and, with a little luck, excellent views of the endemics. From my limited experience the descriptions of sites on both islands are excellent. Time of year is an important factor to consider when visiting these locations.

Lord Howe Island falls into the second category and is a major breeding site for a number of seabirds: White and Sooty Terns, Black-winged and Providence Petrels, and Little Shearwater to name a few. Again time of year is important. All of these species can be seen from land but most seabirders will want to take a trip to Ball's Pyramid to see White-bellied Storm Petrel, Grey Ternlet and Kermadec Petrel.

My only quibble with the information provided for these islands is the lack of a map showing the key birding locations. Although excellent directions to the sites are given, nothing beats a good mud-map for planning purposes.

To sum up, despite the issues raised, this book is an important addition to existing books on where to find birds in Australia. Australian listers will find the sections on the northern islands and territories of most interest, given the experience of at least one of the authors in the area, but there is plenty of information for birders of all degrees of skill and interest. It is well worth having if you plan to go birding anywhere 'new' in Australia.

REFERENCES

- Bransbury, John. 1987, repr. 2000. *Where to find birds in Australia*. Waymark, Northiam, E. Sussex.
- Thomas, R., Thomas, S., Andrew, D. and McBride, A. 2011. *The complete guide to finding the birds of Australia*. 2nd ed. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria.

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