

Book review

SEABIRDS: THE NEW IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

P. Harrison, M. Perrow and H. Larsson

2021. Published by Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. 600 pp.
 Hardback, 75.00€ (AUD ~\$121.00), ISBN 978-84-16278-41-1

Peter Harrison, MBE, is an artist, author, screenwriter and ardent conservationist. His first book, *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, was awarded best bird-book of 1983 by the journal *British Birds* (Harrison 1983). He was awarded his MBE in 2017 for his contributions to natural history and has received the New York Linnaean Society's Eisenmann Award for Excellence in Ornithology. Peter continues to travel the globe, lecturing and guiding, as a founder and partner of Seattle-based Apex Expeditions. Martin Perrow is an ecological consultant. In 2015 he received the Carl Zeiss Award from the British Birds Rarities Committee. Hans Larsson is a leading bird artist. He was voted Bird Artist of the Year (1994) by the leading Swedish ornithological journal *Vår Fågelvärld* and has illustrated numerous books on seabirds.

This book is an identification guide to seabirds: a reference book. Thus, its aim is to comprehensively identify seabirds while incorporating the latest understanding and knowledge that might help identify the birds. According to the principal author it is 'by a seabirder for seabirders'.

The book is presented like all field guides with general informative material in the front, references and index in the back, and the bulk of the book placed centrally with the species' accounts. The species' accounts have their illustrations on the right facing pages and their associated information on the left facing pages. The taxonomic order and textual accounts closely follow the *HBW and BirdLife International Checklist of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo and Collar 2014) and the *IOC World Bird List managed by the International Ornithologists Union* (Gill *et al.* 2021). Additionally, the book has incorporated reliable scientific updates.

The front material includes, a preface, acknowledgements and an introduction providing information on groupings, followed by a glossary and figures highlighting seabird morphology, and the main oceans and islands referred to in the species' accounts. The species' accounts cover 434 seabird species with many illustrations per species, which depict distinct subspecies, sexes, ages and morphs, overall there are 3800 colour illustrations on 239 plates. All illustrations are in colour and are high quality and large enough to quickly comprehend plumage patterns.

Clearly the most obvious strength of this book, which hit me the moment I opened it, was the plates providing the various age morphs and sexes of each species. I would have also liked to have seen the eggs added, as egg-patterning can be variable between breeding grounds, but perhaps most people will not be visiting breeding colonies. To test the book's value in identifying difficult taxa I looked at frigate birds as easy birds to identify to genus, but often very difficult to identify to species. This difficulty was discussed in the genus account with pages of

additional illustrations provided and a great deal more text given in acknowledgement of the problem.

The text associated with each species' account appears either adequate or more than adequate. Each account gives details on range and movements, calls and plumage followed by a section on similar species, which is often quite detailed. The book meets its objective of identifying seabirds and is likely the best resource that would fit into a back-pack or perhaps on the shelf of a cabin. At 1.7 kg and 15.6 × 23.5 cm it is a little cumbersome. The pages are glossy allowing small spills of my wife's chocolate mousse to be cleaned off without damage.

Its role as a research text is clear to me. If I had it a year ago when I was identifying old mis-labelled museum specimens (Fulton 2021) it would have made my life easier. It will surely facilitate identification of unfamiliar seabirds for individuals of many different skill levels; as such it belongs in many labs, libraries and in the hands of seabirders or people on beaches counting birds.

The level of research to produce this book is staggering. Its genesis lies with the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992–2013), although the current authors have greatly extended and refined that knowledge: over 500 references are cited in the reference section. The style of writing is clear and concise. The abbreviations used in all species' accounts are obvious and necessary. There are short, although detailed, discussions throughout the book for genera and species or groups that are interesting, all are informative and appropriate. There are also paragraph-long introductions to all the 239 plates that add critical information. In all, these features morph the book into a reference text/identification guide and not simply a field guide.

The supplementary material is essentially limited to the inside covers, which are duplicated front and back showing the oceans of the world with yellow dots that give the locations of islands referred to throughout the book. The yellow dots are numbered and the island names given underneath. These maps are entirely fit for purpose.

This book is perhaps best compared to the principal author's previous book on the same subject in 1983, *Seabirds: An Identification Guide* (Harrison 1983). The current version is vastly superior. I would recommend this book to all 'seabirders' amateur or professional. It will be a useful resource for researchers working with seabirds or coastal birds. It will be a useful addition to many research libraries or coastal libraries, perhaps not so for libraries in inland regions.

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