

Although this may seem a lot of species compared to the two which occur in New Zealand, for its size, the overall abundance of raptor species in Australia is low. Compare Australia's 24 species to Africa, with about 90, out of a worldwide total of 285.

Raptors are a very successful group being found on all continents except Antarctica.

In large format, with high quality photographs on nearly every page, *Australian Birds of Prey* consists of 9 chapters beginning with an introduction to the raptors of the world, then on to the 24 species which occur in Australia. A brief description of each, covering appearance, habitat and activities, is followed by a distribution map.

The chapters then focus in detail on each aspect of raptor life, dealing with ecology, lifestyle, reproduction and conservation. Everything you would want to know about the Letter-winged Kite for example, a highly specialised, nocturnal raptor which is particularly dependant on the distribution of the Long-tailed rat which plagues sporadically. Or the rare Red Goshawk, which hunts over an extremely large territory of up to 200 square kilometres.

The author, Penny Olsen is a research fellow with the Division of Botany and Zoology at the Australian National University. She is a world authority on birds of prey. Since 1975 she has been studying Peregrine Falcons near Canberra, although her interests are broad.

I would recommend this book for any birder with an interest in raptors, although the beautiful photographs are reason enough to add it to your collection.

Pam Agnew



Birds of Polynesia: Cassette Tape, compiled by L.B. McPherson. 1995, McPherson Natural History Unit, Christchurch.

This one hour cassette contains field recordings of 56 species of birds (some common, others very scarce and endangered) which occur in Polynesia. All tracks are in mono sound. In order, there are 10 from the Pitcairn Group recorded by Jim Jolly in 1991; 6 from Rarotonga and 1 from Mangaia, Cook Islands, by Michael Taylor, 1981 and 1986; 8 from the Republic of Kiribati by Katino Teeb'aki, warden on Christmas Island, in 1987-88; 3 from Niue Island by Les McPherson in 1982; 1 from Tonga, 18 from Western Samoa and 4 from Fiji, mainly by Tim Lovegrove on the "Derwent" expedition of 1982; and 5 from Rotuma by Les McPherson in 1986. Hence the collection is a limited one which reflects the available opportunities for recording by the few ornithologists who have taken suitable equipment from New Zealand to Pacific locations. Nevertheless, the tape is a worthy effort to meet the objective of making bird sounds available both to research scientists and to tourists with a serious interest in nature.

The recordings are generally clear and the featured bird can be identified easily, even when it is not the first sound to be heard on the particular track. For each track, the accompanying booklet gives the scientific and common name of the target species, the location, date and hour of the recording, and a brief note of the conditions. Thus we are informed that the Polynesian Triller of Rotuma is giving its territorial song against a background of surf. The early morning song of the Samoan Whistler is recorded with Samoan Fantail and fruit doves in the background, and the Red-vented Bulbul is heard against crickets and village sounds. The tracks are announced only by the name of the principal species, which allows the listener to concentrate on the ambience of the tape, with the guide in hand for extra information. The most useful recordings for the travelling ornithologist are likely to be those of the pigeons and doves. These birds, although often hard to sight, produce a variety of mysterious-sounding calls, highly evocative of the forests of Samoa, for example.

The land birds include several warbler and flycatcher species which are endemic to particular islands, and various Trillers, Whistlers and Honeyeaters, notably the giant Mao, recorded by Tim Lovegrove at 2900 feet near the summit of Savai'i Island. The selection also has the crake of Henderson Island, Banded Rail, two waders (a Wandering tattler on Muri Beach, Rarotonga, and a pair of curlews on Henderson) and twelve sea-bird types, such as Red-tailed Tropic bird, terns, petrels and both Greater and Lesser Frigatebirds. All are interesting to hear, although the restriction to a single "cut" for each species means that we may find only the bird's most common sound, for example its contact or alarm call. A minor quibble concerns the sub-title of the collection, "Bristle-thighed Curlew to Lesser Shrikebill". These happen to be the first and last species on the tape, although the species are not in any check-list order. A short list of the islands whose birds are featured would be a more useful adjunct to the title.

The introductory text contains the hope that more workers will be stimulated to undertake sound recording during ventures into Polynesia – a wish heartily endorsed by this reviewer, especially now that more advanced equipment, such as a digital cassette recorder can be employed.

This tape, and the companion volumes forming a sound guide to New Zealand birds, are available from McPherson Natural History Unit, PO Box 21-083, Edgeware, Christchurch, and priced at \$15.

Michael Taylor