

Field guide to the birds of North America. Published by the National Geographic Society. 1983.

This addition to the various field guides to American birds features 220 full-colour plates of the 800-odd species from Canada to the Mexican border, showing more than 2400 plumages. For carrying in the pocket, I would still prefer the Peterson guides, where a greater number of confusable species can be shown on one plate with diagnostic differences indicated. But anybody planning a bird tour of North America would find this book worth acquiring to pour over before leaving home, and for the wader enthusiast the illustrations are a delight. In the introduction it is stated that average lengths of each species (and each sex where they differ) are quoted, based on measurements from skins, which is an improvement on the apparently haphazard measurements criticised by Eric Jones (*Aust. Bird Watcher*, 1983, 10:28-32). However, it seems that an error has crept in in one case, where the length quoted for the Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) is 23ins (58 cm) and for the Far-eastern Curlew 17ins (43 cm). Prater *et al.* (*Guide to the identification and aging of Holarctic Waders* BTO Guide 17) give wing lengths of 28 N. *americanus* as 257-296 mm and of 45 N. *madagascariensis* as 281-333. Shortest wing-length recorded there for *americanus* is actually 1mm less than the largest wing-length given for 19 N. *hudsonicus*. N. *americanus* has a relatively longer bill, but I doubt whether this would make the species look nearly one-third larger than *madagascariensis*. That, however, is the only thing I have been able to criticise. The book is obtainable from National Geographic Society, Dept. 100, Washington, D.C. 20036. Price \$US 13.95 plus \$US 3.00 for postage and handling.

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Australian birds with a sense of humour.

This excellent cassette recorded, narrated and produced by Dr Paul White gives the calls of six species, including two usually regarded rather as master mimics. Side 1 of this cassette, which runs for 9 min 15s, introduces the following species with informed comment: Kookaburra, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Eastern Whipbird, Noisy Frairbird, Red Wattlebird, Little Wattlebird, Aust Crow, with mimicry and song from Superb Lyrebirds and the Satin Bowerbird. Side 2 introduces the same species without the spoken identification.

I found the second side of the tape most useful in checking my identification of Australian species by sound alone. This is not easy and would repay a greater effort many times over.

As far as I am aware some of the species presented on this tape, which is one of a series of six, have rarely been available commercially before. One minor criticism is the lack of dates and times of recording along with the location data. For the scientist, such information, along with that on behaviour, can be of critical importance. For the informed layman the data are still useful but perhaps not essential.

This high-quality cassette is number three in a series that includes *Bird song from O'Reilly's* (a nature park in Queensland), *Lyrebird*, *Rhapsody in black and white spring song*, and *Bells in the Australian bush*. These are available