

Seabirds of New Zealand, by Elaine Power. 1979. Auckland: Collins. 44 pp. \$9.95.

Those who liked Elaine Power's three previous books will also like this one. Like them, *Seabirds* continues to reflect the enthusiasm of an amateur field-naturalist. The paintings and sketches seem to aim at conveying the impression of birds, yet with care for detail; they are fresh, bright, and alive. As usual, some succeed (e.g. Black-backed Gull, Caspian Tern, White-faced Storm Petrel), others do not (e.g. a fault in perspective produces an apparently battleship-sized Flesh-footed Shearwater). Personally, I prefer on the whole the often charming monochrome sketches, although I don't like the kingfisher-like Caspian or the faulty tail-shape of the Black-fronted Tern. The text is brief and informative.

It would be unfair to analyse the paintings in severe ornithological criticism. The book is surely aimed mainly at public enjoyment and to be a general guide to, mostly, major species. As such it will deservedly enjoy the same popularity as the three previous books in the series. Review copy deposited in OSNZ library.

B. D. HEATHER

A field guide to the seabirds of Britain and the world, by G. S. Tuck & H. Heinzel. 1978. 292 pages; 48 plates in colour, 313 maps, 138 line drawings. Collins, London. £5.25.

It has become fashionable in recent years for some authors of bird books to take on the world. This ambitious book on the seabirds of the world is an example. Both the author, Captain Gerald Tuck, and the illustrator, Hermann Heinzel, are to be congratulated for attempting the daunting task of describing and illustrating some 303 species of seafowl, about 88 of which are albatrosses and petrels (Procellariiformes), the rest including penguins, cormorants, phalaropes and gulls.

At first sight, the reader is impressed with the book's scope, layout, binding, and production. The line drawings throughout the text are attractive, and the 16 pages devoted to world distribution maps appear useful. Closer examination of the text, however, reveals the author's difficulty with words, and many errors and inconsistencies of fact. Because of these, the book quickly becomes fogbound. On pages 14 and 15, for example, the bills of albatrosses are illustrated and described. We are told that for the Royal Albatross the cutting edges of both mandibles are black; not so, only the tomium of the upper mandible (maxilla) is black. The bill of the "Shy Albatross" is described as follows, "Bill grey, with distinct orange tip; bluish lateral plates run up in front of eye; dark horseshoe stripe behind nostril." This description is perplexing at best and wrong at worst. The bill is a pale greenish grey with a yellow (not orange) tip to both mandibles. The skin between the bill plates is dark blue, and the transverse fleshy stripe at the gape is orange. What the "bluish lateral plates" in front of the eyes are, I cannot imagine. For the Buller's Albatross, we read, "Bill greyish black, with a yellow stripe, along the upper (*sic*) and mandible." One needs a translator (or a good editor) to decipher this code. The remaining descriptions of albatrosses' beaks on page

15 are similarly flawed in their description, and *Diomedea nigripes* on the same page is misspelt.

While I am delighted that the author has got the bill colour of the Broad-billed Prion correct (too often it is incorrectly described as blue), the prion bills illustrated on page 27 are a disaster. We are told "All prions have the same head pattern" despite literature to the contrary — indeed, the head patterns of the 6 species of *Pachyptila* are a valuable aid in their identification. The sketch of the Thin-billed Prion beak bears little resemblance to the species being described; the closest I found to the Thin-billed Prion is the lateral view of the Fairy Prion. In short, the prion bills illustrated on page 27 should be carefully avoided by observers wishing to identify prions with any measure of success.

Running into distressing problems of this sort, I was hesitant to investigate the book's contents further. I noted in passing that *Pagodroma* is consistently misspelt throughout, and many distributional notes and listed breeding localities are clearly incomplete or out of date.

Considering the patchy quality of the text, the illustrator, Hermann Heinzel, has done a commendable task. Some of his illustrations are superb; others, such as the Mottled Petrel's underparts, perpetuate the myth that this species has a black anterior border to the wing lining in addition to its diagonal underwing bar. Such is not the case. Clearly, however, errors of this kind are not necessarily the fault of the illustrator, who must often rely upon the author and existing literature for assistance.

This book highlights the basic problem of authors who attempt a guide on birds, some or many of which they have never seen. It is all too often an unsuccessful recipe for a practical and useful publication.

That an up-to-date book on the seabirds of the world is needed is beyond doubt. In my opinion, however, the sort of publication desired requires the talents of several authors who are prepared to do their homework throughout the literature and the skill of an editor to oversee and polish the final production. In the meantime, however, seabird observers will have to wait: the present regional guides have a lot in their favour.

PETER C. HARPER

Les oiseaux de Chine, de Mongolie, et de Corée, by R. D. Etchecopar and Francois Hue. 1978. Volume I. Non passereaux. 586 pp. 22 col. pl. by Paul Barruel and Francis Berille. Many line drawings and 275 maps. Papeete, Tahiti: les Editions du Pacifique. French text, English species names and index. £44 or £48, depending on source.

The authors planned this work to complete their coverage of the great desert belt from the Canary Islands to Mongolia, two-thirds done in their two well-known works on the birds of North Africa and of the Near and Middle East. With the death of F. Hue in an automobile accident in 1972, this first of two volumes on the birds of China, Mongolia, and Korea has been done largely by Etchecopar alone. It covers an area of enormous size and variety of habitat zones, from the high mountains of the Tibetan plateau, the deserts