

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misspelt throughout, and many distributional notes and listed breeding localities are clearly incomplete or out of date.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

of Mongolia, and the harsh winters of the continental interior and the near-Siberian north to the varied conditions of the long Chinese coastline and the tropical areas of the south. Some 1100 bird species are involved, hence the two volumes, of which this is the first, on non-passerines.

For New Zealanders, apart from its value as a general coverage of the birds of China, Mongolia, Korea, Taiwan and Hainan, this book covers the breeding area of some and the migratory routes of many of our migrants and stragglers — waders, terns, swifts, and cuckoos. Not knowing the two previous books, I turned to this one hoping to find in it a miraculous extension of J. D. D. La Touche's work (*A handbook of the birds of eastern China*, London 1931-1934), giving ranges of measurements, original plumage descriptions including stages of moult and of intermediate plumages encountered in the region, times and routes of migration, flock sizes, a clue to the movements of our mystery migrant, the Knot, the stragglers from North America, and so on. Naive hope.

Given the political barriers to research by outsiders and the lack of ornithologists, past or present, in the region, the available information is limited and often vague. The authors could not study all the birds at first hand, although they had studied most of them in neighbouring lands. The format and content are little different from a field guide. Each species receives $\frac{1}{2}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$ pages of text, divided into identification, including field characteristics; behaviour, mainly general habitat, food and manner of feeding; nesting; distribution and subspecies; and a brief note on world distribution.

On waders and egrets, there is little new to learn; there may be more in other groups, but I am not competent to judge. The notes on world distribution gives New Zealand very mixed credit as a wintering centre; many species are mentioned, but not Mongolian or Sand Dotterels, stints, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, White-winged Black Tern, and, most incredible of all, the Knot. The annual influx of Common Terns to Australia is not mentioned, and the Whiskered Tern is said to "reach Australia and New Zealand," a bad misinterpretation of the Australian breeding species and the NZ Black-fronted Tern. I wonder what sources were used for Australasia; certainly not the NZ *Checklist*, but with no bibliography I cannot tell.

Is this book worth having? In theory, yes indeed. Despite the admitted and unavoidable imperfect depth of treatment, it summarises all that in general is *known* of the region, incorporating the early writings of Pere David, Oustalet and others, the more recent publications of La Touche and Cheng, and of authors such as Dementiev & Gladkov, Hachisuka, Vaurie, and Gore & Won dealing with neighbouring lands, and the authors' own experiences and their examination of museum collections, especially the large collections in the Museum of Natural History in Paris. For New Zealanders, it is the *only* available reference to fill an important gap in understanding Pacific birds and to provide a guide to the rich non-passerine fauna of China.

At \$20 or \$30, I'd buy it instantly; I'd be strongly tempted at \$40. But at \$90-100, it's ludicrous. However, the review copy is now in the OSNZ library.

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