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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIRDS: A
COMPREHENSIVE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BY
INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS.
Consultant Editor, Joseph Forshaw.**

*1998. 2nd Edition. University of New South Wales
Press/Weldon Owen Productions, Sydney. Pp. 240, 200
colour photographs, many maps and figures. \$49.95*

This is a large format book, beautifully laid out with stunning photographs. Its contributing authors constitutes a mini-list of who's who in ornithology around the world. The book is divided into two sections: Part one (29 pages) contains 6 short chapters covering anatomy, taxonomy, evolution, habitat and adaptations, behaviour, and conservation, respectively; Part two (187 pages) contains 47 chapters each covering a specific taxonomic group, orders for nonpasserines and suborders for passerines. With the very limited space provided, the experts deliver concise, well written summaries.

Ornithologists and experienced bird-watchers may find the information provided here to be too general to suit their needs. Practically every chapter suffers from lack of sufficient space to adequately describe the diversity of species within each taxonomic group. Less than a page of text, for example, is used to describe the Cuckooshrikes (family:Campehagidae) with 72 species; Woodpeckers and Barbets (order: Piciformes) with 378 species are allocated 5 pages (2.5 pages of text and 2.5 pages of photographs and drawings); and so on. At the front of each chapter is a box called 'key facts' that contains a list of endangered and vulnerable species, identifies the largest and smallest species within the group, and posts the number families and species. I am not sure why these data are considered 'key' facts by the editors. Personally, I would value a summary of common physiological, anatomical and behavioural features shared by all or most species within each family: instead, such information is scattered throughout the text in some, but not all, of the descriptions.

Also at the front of each section is a single map on which the distribution of all species within the Order (or Suborder) is depicted in one colour (e.g. a map showing the distribution of 220 species of cranes and their allies essentially means the whole globe, minus the polar regions, is coloured in). Except for the smaller orders (e.g. Struthioniformes), I can't see much use for the maps.

When buying a reference book I always take a look at the list of sources cited. But for this encyclopedia there isn't one. There are two pages of 'Further Reading' placed at the end of the book. Organized by taxonomic group, is a list of field guides, dictionaries to birds, references to chapters in handbooks and a few scientific papers. The extensive index, on the other hand, adds greatly to the book's usefulness: both common and scientific names (down to species in many cases) are included.

My criticisms may seem harsh but I have assumed that readers of this review would be professional ornithologists. However, I believe the book's intended audience are amateur ornithologists and bird watchers who may spend a good deal of time travelling to different locations to see new species. For these readers, the *Encyclopedia of Birds* provides a concise overview of birds of the world, along with engaging text and stunning photographs (it is worth repeating because they really are). Moreover, the captions provided with each photograph are very informative. The physical size of the book (32 cm x 24 cm x 2.5 cm) may indicate that the publisher expects that some people will buy it as a coffee table book. Truthfully, I would be happy to receive this handsome volume as a present. I have enjoyed browsing through the text and gawking at the incredible close-up photography of birds that I will probably never see first hand in the wild.

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