
Book reviews

Edited by P. Dann

MALLEE COUNTRY WILDLIFE — THE NATURE OF THE LOWER MURRAY-DARLING BASIN by Sid Cowling

1993 Gould League and Victorian Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Melbourne. Pp. 64, b&w plates 15, many colour and b&w illustrations, 207 x 294 mm. \$19.95.

The footnote on the title page of this small book (65 A4 pages) states that it has been designed primarily to fill a gap in educational and informative material on the Mallee Country of the lower Murray-Darling basin by providing a basic understanding and overview of the different lands found throughout this region. Having read with interest this attractively produced book, I can confidently declare that the aims of the author and the publishers have been more than adequately achieved.

Following a brief introduction, a total of 14 different landscape types are individually described in clear, simple terms including a section dealing either with some distinctive ecological or conservation issue. Immediately after each landscape description, there are two pages devoted to more detailed descriptions of individual plants and animals, most of which have been reproduced in colour at the bottom of both pages. Again, there is a minimum of scientific jargon used with a wealth of ecological information available for students and other readers wishing to gain a broad overview of resident taxa. The book concludes with two sections covering the important topics of fire and conservation of mallee country. The Glossary and Index are both comprehensive while the references cited cover most publications relevant to mallee ecology published in the past three decades.

I have no serious criticisms to offer although I must confess to feeling somewhat uncomfortable, after 30 years' residence on the Riverine Plain, on seeing the 5 670 000 hectares of chenopod shrublands and grasslands described as part of the 'Mallee Country' — the vast open tracts of saltbush on the Old Man and One Tree plains bear little structural resemblance to mallee shrublands although I do accept that they are all part of the lower Murray-Darling basin. Unfortunately, the photograph on page 21 shows a dense stand of buckbush or soft roly poly *Salsola kali* and not saltbush as stated in the caption. In this context, the topographic sections for both the 'Saltbush and Bluebush Plains' and 'Grasslands', shown on pages 21 and 25 respectively,

ly, are too simplistic and do not show the catenary sequences related to source-bordering dunes and prior streams that are so characteristic of the geomorphology of the Riverine Plain.

I would not wish this minor criticism to deter potential readers from enjoying what is really an excellently produced publication, both in terms of structure and quality of information contained therein. The book is cheaply priced and I can strongly recommend its purchase by all educational institutions, as well as individuals, concerned with the long-term management and conservation of these unique landscapes.

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SHOREBIRDS OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST by Denis Paulson, with drawings by Jim Erckmann

1993 University of Washington Press. Pp. xv + 406. Colour plates 98, distribution maps 10. 155 x 230 mm. US\$40.

Shorebirds of the Pacific Northwest covers 79 shorebird species, of which 63 occur regularly or are vagrants, with the remainder being potential visitors. The geographic coverage includes southern British Columbia, the whole of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, and western Montana.

There are seven chapters. The first five deal with a variety of subjects, including anatomy and plumages, the annual life cycle, distribution, identification and conservation. The final two chapters, consuming nearly 300 pages, contain detailed species accounts. There are five appendices, one a gazetteer with the remainder covering shorebird status in the region, earliest and latest migration dates, and biometrics. The literature citations exceed 600. A comprehensive index is provided.

The book is a sheer delight to read, with much to satisfy both the aficionado and the tyro. The author has a pleasingly direct style and the photographs, many by the author, and the line drawings, by Jim Erckmann, are of a consistently high standard. Both author and artist are obviously knowledgeable about the region and its shorebirds and have combined to produce what is, in my opinion, the best regional shorebird text yet published.

They have rich material to work with. The preface commences with the statement that 'The Pacific Northwest is a shorebird place' — and it certainly is! The region provides a wide variety of coastal and inland habitats that attract both migrants and breeders. Extremely large numbers occur on northward migration with Grays Harbor, alone, supporting hundreds of thousands of Western Sandpipers and Dunlin in late April.

As an avid waderologist, I found much of interest in the species accounts. These are extensive in detail, covering such subjects as distribution, status, structure, plumage, identification, voice, a listing of useful published photographs and references. A unique, and very useful, section in most accounts is entitled 'Further Questions'. This contains a list of so-far unanswered questions that provide research opportunities for amateurs and professionals, alike. An innovation that other authors could follow very beneficially.

The author and artist do a particularly good job of providing information, assisted by photographs, drawings and tables, on how to separate species within difficult groups, such as Long- and Short-billed Dowitchers, Ringed and Semi-palmated Plovers, Long-toed Stints

and Least Sandpipers, the Tattlers, Yellowlegs and Stints.

Australasians will find the book a useful reference text as 42 of the species covered have occurred in their region, and some of the remainder are certainly potential visitors. Those also wanting to learn more about North American shorebird visitors to our part of the world will find much of interest.

Birders visiting the Pacific Northwest will have little difficulty in planning the shorebird part of their itinerary if they use the information in the species accounts.

An appealing aspect of the book is the use of quotations at the beginning of chapters. One, in particular, attracted me — that of Jack Connor's, which headed the chapter on shorebird identification — 'The inscrutability of this group of birds is made even more painful by their enormous aesthetic appeal.' While *Shorebirds of the Pacific Northwest* can only add to their appeal, it certainly has done much to lift the veil of inscrutability. A good buy!

Mark Barter

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The following people were consulted as referees during 1994. The editor thanks them for their help, without which the standards of the journal could not be maintained. He particularly thanks those people who reviewed several papers (indicated by *) and apologises for this inevitable happening where themes are interrelated or where their expert knowledge was a very rare resource.

B. Beehler*, G. Beruldsen, G. Borgia, S. Blaber*, M.G. Brooker*, D. Bryant, A. Burbidge, L. Christidis*, B. Coates*, R. Crozier, P. Dann*, P. Dunn, J. Diamond, P. Dyer*, H.A. Ford*, C.B. Frith*, P. Fullagar*, R. Gales, S. Garnett, S. Garradd, K. Hulsman, R. Holdaway, D. Jones, L. Joseph*, E. Krebs, A. Lill, D. Macfarland, I. Norman, J. Ogden, P. Olsen, R.B. Payne, D. Paton, A. Poiani, S. Pruett-Jones, H.F. Recher, P. Reilly, M.G. Ridpath, D. Robinson, F.N. Robinson, P.G. Ryan, D.A. Saunders*, R. Schodde*, P. Slater, G.T. Smith*, S.C. Tidemann, G. van Tets*, B. Weavers, R.D. Wooller.