



Book Review

Quail, Buttonquail and Plains-wanderer in Australia and New Zealand

By J. M. Forshaw and F. Knight
2023, CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne
pp. 200,
Price AUD \$170.00, ISBN 9781486312597

The author of this book, Joseph Forshaw AM, is a research associate in the ornithological section at the Australian Museum and the author of a number of award-winning books on natural history. In 2015, he was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to ornithology and wildlife conservation. Illustrations in the book were made by Frank Knight who has been a prominent wildlife illustrator for more than 30 years. His illustrations were included in The Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* (1997) and more recently the *Field Guide to the Frogs of Australia* (2020).

This book attempts to give a detailed account of the six species of quail, seven species of buttonquail and the Plains-wanderer, in Australia and New Zealand. It is intended as a serious academic work. The author states, ‘This book has been planned as a reference work...’ Its aim is to comprehensively review these birds updating them from the last serious reference work, the *Handbook of Australian New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (HANZAB) Volume 2, which was published in 1994. This group of birds has been selected by the author because they share a convergent morphological similarity not because they are closely related. The New Zealand taxa have been included primarily because the New Zealand Quail *Coturnix novaeseelandiae* has been separated from the Australian Stubble Quail *C. pectoralis*. But also through the introduction of the Brown Quail *Synoicus ypsilophorus* from Australia to New Zealand and the introduction of the Californian Quail *Callipepla californica* from New Zealand to King Island, Tasmania and Norfolk Island.

The book is laid out with a forward, preface and introduction, followed by species accounts given in phylogenetic order. It is concluded with a gazetteer, references (nine pages) and two indexes: one for common names and another for scientific names. The species accounts are thorough including limited discussions on the Order, Family and

Tribe followed by more detailed sections on each species. Sections include: description, distribution, subspecies, calls, habits and status, diet and feeding, movements, breeding, eggs and aviary notes. The habits, status, diet and feeding sections are the most comprehensive. The sections have pictures, drawings, tables and maps to help interpret and extend the text as required. The audience addressed by this book is primarily a zoological academic audience, although the book will undoubtedly reach and interest many general bird enthusiasts. I expect it will act as a starter for postgraduate students and wildlife managers.

This book has many strengths the first being its treatment using the post HANZAB literature. In this regard it has added to the understanding of these birds, which was a primary objective of the author. Other strengths include the use of tables, maps and figures to communicate complex data. The text is well written and concise and the well-organised layout makes it easily accessible to the intended audiences. The Harvard style referencing followed by the author facilitates the academic needs, but does not put it out of reach to general readers. The educational benefits are quite broad because it is accessible and data rich. Anyone from primary school teachers to upper-level academics will benefit from it as a reference source, although I also see it playing a role as a starter for those beginning to research the species. The layout with tables in particular allows for the easy extraction of data such as the variety and species of seeds eaten.

The references come at the end of the book rather than after each species, which makes searching them easier. In general, I found this book to be well-referenced; however, some of my recent papers, from periods within the scope of the book post HANZAB, were missing. For example: [Fulton \(2017, 2020\)](#), both of which highlighted endangered marsupials as egg-predators of the Painted Button quail *Turnix variegatus* and [Fulton \(2019\)](#) found the Plains-wanderer

Pedionomus torquatus was prey of Wedge-tailed Eagles *Aquila audax*. Despite these annoying omissions, I still feel the book is well-referenced by a knowledgeable author. The level of detail is high, but the detail is well organised within the appropriately marked sections.

There is plenty of supplementary material from distribution maps of each species to photographs of the eggs, which provide accurate representations. Frank Knight has supplied diagnostic figures for all taxa with further figures including full page figures of the birds in their environment, which are scattered throughout the book and make it an aesthetically more pleasing read. A map of Australia and a gazetteer are given near the end of the book, the gazetteer giving all the place names referred to in the text, including New Zealand localities. All illustrations are well done and accurate. The book itself is printed on thick glossy paper, which at times made me think I was holding two pages instead of one. Beyond these there are aviary note sections on most species except for the extinct New Zealand Quail and some of the less common and less well-known buttonquails.

When reading this book I was quickly reminded of the *Pigeons and Doves in Australia* by Forshaw and Cooper, published in 2015 (see review [Fulton 2016](#)). It has a similar structure and similar goals, which both books achieve

admirably. They stand out above other books focused on specific bird groups. I recommend this book to both serious ornithologists and general bird enthusiasts, it will serve both groups well.

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Conflicts of interest. The author declares no conflicts of interest.