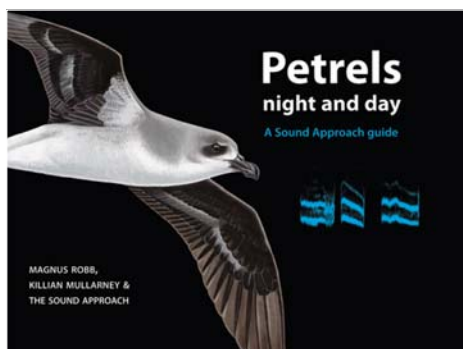


REVIEWS



Petrels – night & day. A Sound Approach Guide by Magnus Robb, Killian Mullarney & The Sound Approach. The Sound Approach, Poole. 2008. ISBN 978-90-810933-2-3. 300 pages, numerous photos, maps, artwork and sonagrams, 2 CDs. Hardback, £34.95 plus p&p outside UK.

Although I had commented on one chapter at the draft stage, I had little idea what to expect when the review copy of *Petrels – night & day* dropped on my desk. Certainly I had no inkling that, between the book's covers, I would find an extraordinary combination of ripping yarns, beautiful artwork, two evocative CDs and scientific speculation that was well informed and bang up-to-date.

How is this pulled off? Well, the bare bones are that, one by one, the 22 procellariiform species breeding in the northeast Atlantic, from Cape Verdes northwards and including the

Mediterranean, are given similar treatment; that is, an account of the authors' visits to the species' colonies, a quick resumé of breeding biology, a more detailed description of calls illustrated by CD tracks, and a discussion of whether the vocalisations suggest taxonomic revision might be called for.

The sheer enthusiasm in the face of the misadventures of island hopping is a delight. 'We had seen photographs of boats used by birders before, and they looked big enough to carry a football team. Our boat was not only very small, but also appeared to be falling apart', describes a trip to Raso to search out Cape Verde Shearwaters *Calonectris edwardsii*. Having made the same journey, possibly in the same boat, to study Raso Larks *Alauda razae*, I know the feeling. Or again in the Cape Verdes, but this time in pursuit of White-faced Storm-petrels *Pelagodroma marina*, an outboard could only be provoked into temporary life by the insertion of tubing. When the boatman and suspect motor abandoned Magnus Robb, taking his recording kit, he pleaded with fate. 'The optimist in me hoped that [the boatman] was just going back to get another mouthful of tubing. I politely asked the pessimist in me not to think at all.'

Within this mesh of excitement emerge extraordinary facts that I did not know. For example the shearwaters of Menorca appear

to be ill-understood hybrids of *Puffinus mauretanicus* and *P. yelkouan*. Quite amazingly, the Atlantic's very first Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*, ringed on the Salvages in 1983, was re-caught in August 2007. Incidentally, the fact that that news is included in the text of this book, published early in 2008, illustrates a speed of publication that shames the larger, established publishers.

The photographs are of a consistently high standard. Some are outstanding: a White-faced Storm-petrel dancing off the sea surface, a Leach's Storm-petrel *O. leucorhoa* sliding down the face of a spume-strewn yellow-brown wave breaking off the English coast. No less pleasing are Killian Mullarney's plates, essentially one per species. While the plates show features crucial to identification, and the text captions are clearly aimed at the hardcore birder, the jizz of the birds is superbly captured and the plates just look aesthetically right.

Dipping into the CDs was a treat. I reminded myself of the difference between Madeiran *O. castro* and Leach's Storm-petrels. I learnt the sound of Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*, a species I have never heard. Perhaps the ideal listening arrangement would be a foul winter's night, the wind lashing on the windows, the log fire subsiding, and the chance to let gruff female and higher-pitched male Cory's Shearwater *C. diomedea*

calls drag me on a magic acoustic carpet to a balmy Macaronesian evening.

Reviews such as this almost routinely carry a 'but'. My but is small (so to speak). The authors place great weight on the use of calls as an aid to taxonomic decisions. Not for a moment would I deny their utility but, for me, a difference in the calls of two populations does not, without corroborating evidence from other features, provide sufficient justification for a

taxonomic split, at any level. For example, the splitting of the Mediterranean Storm-petrel as a full species *Hydrobates melitensis* might be a step too far for some. I could cite other, similar examples which generate the 22 species mentioned above. In their defence, the authors explain their reasoning thoroughly and do not propose any scientific names other than those already existing.

This is a terrific book, a record of a love affair with the birds and

their islands. It is also a convincing riposte to anyone who thinks passion and scientific curiosity are uncomfortable bedfellows. Buy it.

M. de L. Brooke

SPECIAL READER'S OFFER

Petrels – night & day. £30 per book (normally £34.95)

To order, phone 01202 676622 or email info@soundapproach.co.uk, quoting 'Seabird Group'.

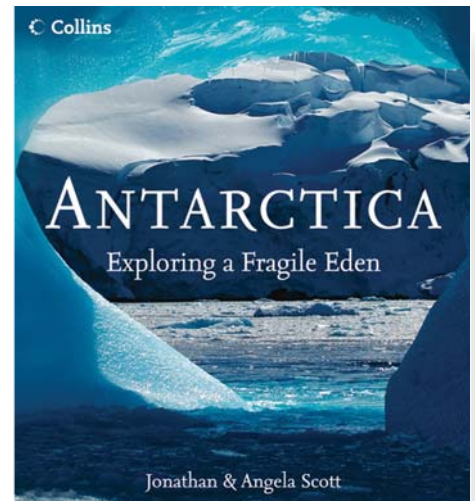
Antarctica: Exploring a Fragile Eden By Jonathan and Angela Scott. Collins, London, UK. 2007. ISBN 10 0-00-718345-3. 255 pages, many colour photographs, line drawings and maps. Hardback, £25.

The Scotts are well known for their work in the Masai Mara and on the BBC with *Big Cat Diary* and other series. Their passion for Antarctica is much in evidence throughout this book. It is a very personal narrative, filled with observed cameos of their numerous visits to the region. Reading it I almost feel I am travelling on a cruise ship with them, leaning over the rails watching Cape Petrels *Daption capense*, fighting past fur seals on a beach, or sitting in the ship's lecture theatre learning about penguin biology. All I am missing is the vast quantities of luxurious food!

Like many cruises to the continent, we first visit the Falkland Islands and then South Georgia before arriving at the Antarctic Peninsula. Interspersed are chapters on the discovery of Antarctica, albatrosses, Shackleton, whales, the Pole, and pack ice. Despite the many clichés (albatrosses are 'ocean wanderers', whales are

'great leviathans'), and some rather odd metaphors (the southern ocean is 'a giant watery glove'), these chapters do impart a fair bit of knowledge and are very readable. The fur seals' demise at man's hand and their subsequent recovery, and the Falkland's squid fishery and its impact on Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome* and Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys* populations there, are just two of many stories well told. Their retelling of Shackleton's epic journey, and other accounts of astonishing hardship and bravery by early polar explorers, greatly enhance this book.

Inevitably a few mistakes have crept in, such as the authors getting confused by the identity of oystercatchers (describing a Blackish *Haematopus ater* yet calling it Magellanic *H. leucopodus*) and steamerducks (they call the Falkland Steamerduck *Tachyeres brachypterus* a Magellanic *T. pteneres*). Birders will be more concerned by their uncertain approach to albatross taxonomy. Despite stating that there are 24 species, all forms are thereafter lumped in the conservative manner. A more consistent approach would have been better. These are, however, rather



minor mishaps that do not detract from the Antarctic experiences, which the Scotts generally convey well.

As one would expect from two award-winning photographers, the photos are all good and occasionally sensational. Some can also however seem somewhat clichéd, views through ice caves having been taken on another Scott's journey a century ago. You also feel you have seen some of the wildlife photos before, but I suppose there are only so many angles from which to view a King Penguin *Aptenodytes*

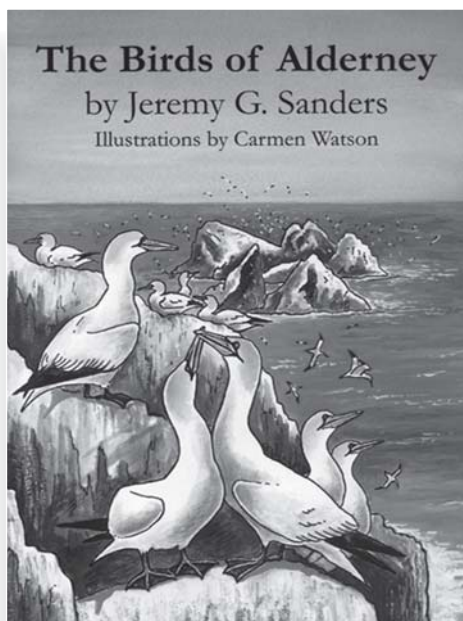
patagonicus colony, or an Adelie Penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae* on ice. Birders will be disappointed by the range of species depicted. Of the 71 photos where birds feature, 54 depict eight species of penguin, including 17 Adelie, 14 Emperor *A. forsteri* and 10 King. Nine albatross photos feature four each of Black-browed and Wandering *Diomedea exulans*, and one of Royal, while Procellariidae are

covered by just two giant petrels and a Cape Petrel and there are none of Hydrobatidae. The text is similarly biased, leaving birders the impression that this book is for general tourists, not them.

The Scotts would no doubt make very good and knowledgeable companions on a visit to Antarctica, and to be fair it was their intention to tell the continent's story as if on a cruise

ship, which is how the vast majority of people lucky enough to visit Antarctica will experience it. Many points of interest are well enough covered to give a good insight into the whole Antarctic experience. It is certainly worth a read before a visit, and makes a good souvenir of an Antarctic cruise.

Richard Schofield



The Birds of Alderney by Jeremy G. Sanders. The Press at St Anne, Alderney. 2007. ISBN 978-0-946760-61-9. 320 pages, line drawings throughout, three maps. Hardback, £25, available (incl. p&p) from J. G. Sanders, PO Box 24, Alderney, GY9 3AP, Channel Islands, UK.

Alderney is the most northerly of the British Channel Islands lying just 16 km due west of the Cotentin peninsula of France. It is tiny, at 6 km long at its greatest length and 2.4 km wide at its greatest width. Some will

argue that there is little scope for a volume about the birds of this small place compared to one that deals with birds of the Channel Islands as a whole. I have a different opinion. For starters, an assemblage of all the information about the birds of Alderney is a precursor to a volume with a wider scope. Furthermore, Alderney is unique and some of its uniqueness would be lost in a volume covering all Channel Islands. Thus, I welcome Sanders' book.

The book covers more than 130 years of recording, drawing on published and unpublished sources, including assessment of thousands of records from over a hundred observers. However, the contents by Sanders' admission offer a personal view built around his own observations over a period of 25 years. The text is lightly peppered with line drawings by Carmen Watson, some of which are quite pleasing.

The book comprises three introductory chapters, the systematic list (the bulk of the book), and a somewhat redundant section on sketches of Alderney birds that repeats content from earlier in the book. The first introductory chapter provides a general description of Alderney. We are briefly introduced to the climate and to prehistoric times, followed by

more extensive accounts of the various habitats including town, farmland, and coastal regions. The second provides an overview of the birds in categories including seabirds, coastal wading birds, inland breeding birds, migrants, and vagrants. The third introductory chapter reviews ornithology on Alderney. An important element of this for the systematic list is the reliability of the records. There will always be issues in this regard for a volume that covers over a century of records, especially with the earliest records. For Alderney, issues of validation of records persist in modern times since there is no single formal records panel. Indeed, unavoidably the author more-or-less is the sole adjudicator, but is transparent in this regard.

The systematic list follows the species order in use by the British Ornithologists Union in 2006. Each account starts with the species' English name and scientific name, briefly states the status on Alderney, and then delivers a succinct yet comprehensive account of its occurrence on Alderney from the earliest to most recent records. I would like to have seen a checklist of the birds of Alderney following the systematic list.

Alderney is probably most famous for its important

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* colonies and for this reason Northern Gannet correctly receives extra attention in the systematic list, in a span of ten pages, while the demise of Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica* from 100,000 birds in the 1940s to the current 250 pairs is afforded 17 pages. There are many species that have rarely been recorded on Alderney, including a few surprises like Gadwall *Anas strepera* on only two occasions,

putting it on par with Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*! Such seemingly odd statistics are so typical of small island avifauna. Inclusion of Levantine (Yelkouan) Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* might raise a few eyebrows given issues surrounding safe at-sea identification. Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* is included as a *bona fide* visitor. Alderney boasts a fine list of continental vagrants. The only Nearctic vagrants are Blue-

winged Teal *Anas discors*, Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*, and Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*. Overall, the systematic list makes for interesting reading.

This book is informative and must be read if visiting Alderney or studying the avifauna of the Channel Islands. It is well worth a read for general interest on a wet day or winter's evening.

Robert L. Flood

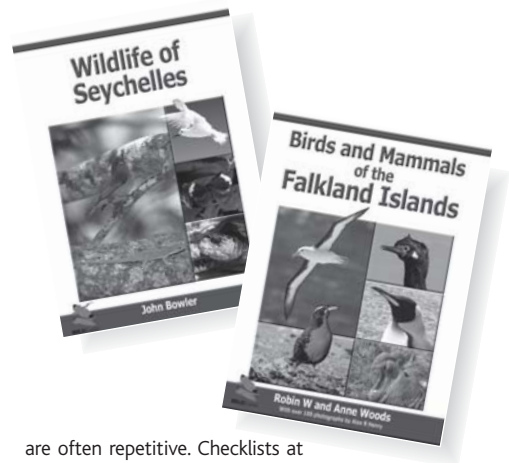
Wildlife of Seychelles By John Bowler. WILDGuides, Old Basing. 2006. ISBN 1-903657-06-7. 192 pages, 51 photographic plates. Hardback, £17.95 (but see reader offer).

The opening of Seychelles International Airport in July 1971 led to a surge in tourism and also in biodiversity research. Apart from the *Smithsonian Preliminary field guide to birds of the Indian Ocean*, published in 1963, not widely available, and including only rough monochrome sketches, the early air travellers had little help in identifying what they saw. Since that time there has, of course, been a huge proliferation of field guides worldwide, including two on Seychelles' birds.

John Bowler's *Wildlife of Seychelles* aims to facilitate identification of most of the more common animals. A brief introductory section describes the islands' geography and climate, habitats, and conservation. In this section the scope of the book is defined as the granitic islands, along with the two nearby coralline islands, Bird and Denis. This is on the basis that the more remote southern island groups are 'relatively depauperate in terms of the terrestrial habitats they support

and the number of terrestrial species present' and are also '... very difficult or expensive for the average person to visit'. While the latter may be true, it is a pity that the outer islands are dismissed in this way without further mention, since some harbour massive and internationally important breeding colonies of seabirds, along with the wintering of most of the world population of the Indian Ocean endemic Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*; Aldabra and Cosmoledo also host indigenous and endemic land birds!

The bulk of the book comprises brief species accounts, accompanied by photographs, of many of the islands' commoner animals (birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, arachnids, crustaceans, millipedes and centipedes, and molluscs), a significant proportion of which are endemic and many have not, to my knowledge, been illustrated before. Most photographs are excellent, while the dragonfly section includes a key accompanied by a helpful set of drawings. The texts for the birds include identification, voice, behaviour and breeding, whereas other taxa have a variety of headings, most including both identification and description; the contents of these two sections



are often repetitive. Checklists at the back of the book cover regularly occurring animals (including birds) and a more comprehensive one of birds recorded up to December 2005; in these, information on birds is duplicated, but using different symbols to designate status.

All of the breeding seabirds are adequately described and illustrated, as are some of the regular migrants. However, describing the Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* as 'possibly an annual vagrant' ignores its breeding in the neighbouring Amirantes group, where important but unmentioned colonies of Roseate Terns *S. dougallii arideensis* also breed. *Gygis alba* is allocated the English name 'Fairy Tern', for

which my preference is the more widely accepted 'White Tern'.

Notwithstanding these shortfalls, this book is undoubtedly a valuable addition to Seychelles guides, allowing visitors to gain a greater appreciation of the uniqueness of Seychelles' fauna but, more importantly,

encouraging the Seychellois to learn about and value their heritage. For me, its greatest utility lies in its coverage of taxa not treated in other guides; keen birders will need more comprehensive field guides.

(Another photographic guide with the same title, by Mike Hill

and David Currie, was published by Collins in 2007)

Chris Feare

WILDGuides will be supporting the work of The Island Conservation Society and The Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles through proceeds of this book.

Birds and Mammals of the Falkland Islands By Robin W. & Anne Woods. WILDGuides, Old Basing. 2006. ISBN 1-903657-10-5. 144 pages, over 100 colour photographs, 43 plates. Hardback, £17.95 (but see reader offer).

As soon as you pick up this book, you get the feeling it is well bound and going to last the course. The front cover is appealing and just inside is a map of the islands, while opening the back cover reveals the grid codes used in the Breeding Birds Survey.

The Introduction takes us through the islands' topography, climate, vegetation, human presence and influence on the environment, predation on birds, and changes in the natural vegetation, before a succinct chapter on 'Conservation: positive action for wildlife'. Here we learn among other things about the local WATCH group, the only overseas branch of this junior section of the UK Wildlife Trusts, so important for the future wildlife of the islands.

Then come the birds – a brief introduction to them followed by a checklist; after which help in knowing 'How to use this book'. Next we come to a brief summary of each bird family, with associated tables. Between this and the species accounts is an illustration of bird topography. If the book is to be used to its full potential, I would have found it

easier to have the section on bird families after the bird topography section, integrated in some way with the species accounts – otherwise you are constantly looking back and forward to marry the two together.

Each species' text is succinct, containing a lot of information in a small space, including a box giving status details. The species are all illustrated with photographs opposite respective texts, over a hundred of which are by Alan Henry. Most are of high quality, although one or two, for example, Magellanic Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides magellani* and Grey-backed Storm-Petrel *Garrodia nereis* are not quite so sharp. Some, such as the Dolphin Gull *Leucophaeus scoresbi* and particularly the Variable Hawk *Buteo polyosoma*, show the range of different plumages that can be a minefield for the unwary. However, I found some of the annotations, explained in the bird plates' introduction, a little difficult to read at times. The only drawback to my mind with photographs is that what you see is what you get: illustrations not necessarily comparable in plumage, size or jizz for similar and difficult species.

But, as the title tells us, birds aren't the only creatures covered here. So, following them, there is a good section on marine mammals and non-domesticated terrestrial mammals. Of the latter, the only native terrestrial

mammal, the Falkland Islands Fox *Dusicyon antarcticus*, known by early settlers as the Warrah, was exterminated by 1876. All other species were introduced. Again, good photographs lie opposite respective texts.

I'm rather a pedant regarding typographical errors and I'm pleased to say could find none. Altogether I liked this approachable book a lot, which is nothing less than expected with authors so synonymous with the birds and other wildlife of the Falkland Islands. I feel it will have a much wider audience than its stated aim of appealing to passengers on cruise ships and land-based visitors.

Wendy Dickson

A contribution will be made by WILDGuides Ltd. to the work of Falklands Conservation for every book sold.

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Wildlife of Seychelles and *Birds and Mammals of the Falkland Islands*. £15 per book (normally £17.95) or £27.50 if both ordered at the same time (p&p free).

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