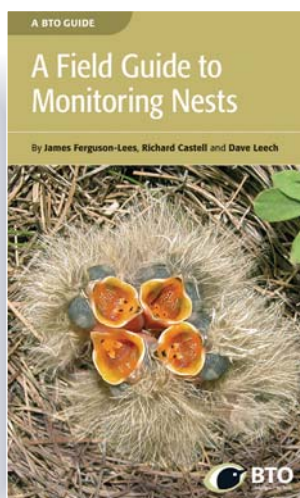


REVIEWS



A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests By James Ferguson-Lees, Richard Castell and Dave Leech. BTO, Thetford. 2011. ISBN 978-1-906204-79-2. 272 pages. Illustrated paperback with 522 colour photographs. 116 x 190 mm. £24.99.

"How many of the current generation of birders know what colour a Robin's eggs are, where a Chiffchaff builds its nest, or when to start looking for a Dunnock's nest?" These words, from the introductory part of this excellent new Field Guide from the BTO, neatly epitomise its *raison d'être*. James Ferguson-Lees and Richard Castell have together seen and studied the nests of all the species described, while Dave Leech is a Senior Research Ecologist at the BTO whose

analysis of nest records supports much of the content.

After a short introduction, the first 52 pages comprise sections titled 'Why monitor nesting birds?' (8 pages), 'Legislation and good practice' (4 pages), 'Fieldwork and monitoring' (14 pages), and 'Nest recording for the BTO' (18 pages). The rest of the book (pp 53–266) gives individual accounts of 146 species. These are divided into broad groups, each with an introductory section containing general tips for finding the nests along with much other useful advice. The groups are wildfowl, gamebirds, seabirds (Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Shag *Ph. aristotelis* - these English names are used throughout the book - oh, what a relief!), herons, grebes, raptors, rails, waders, skuas (2 species), gulls (6), terns (3), auks (4), pigeons, owls, woodpeckers, and nine more groups containing 66 passerines.

The species accounts are first-class. There is a full page, sometimes two, for each species. The authors have gone to great lengths to get good colour photos that show the life cycles of all 146 species. Each species page is enriched with pictures of the adult at or near the nest, eggs in the nest, and small young, and the text

describes these, together with methods of finding the nest. Each also gives expected dates for eggs and young, and a convenient table giving clutch size, hatching period, fledging period, number of broods a year, and (importantly) average number of nest records submitted annually to the BTO Nest Record Scheme. The following are the approximate numbers of records of the commoner gulls submitted each year: Great Black-backed *Larus marinus* < 10 nests; Lesser Black-backed *L. fuscus* 20; Black-headed *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* 50; Herring *L. argentatus* and Common *L. canus* 80 each. Compare these with Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* 650, Shag 450, Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* 400, Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* 450, Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* 400 and Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* 300. There are at least two possible reasons for this under-representation of the commoner gulls. First, it seems that relatively few seabird workers contribute directly to the Nest Record Scheme (for example, I understand that most of the Kittiwake nest records come from the Farne Islands alone). Second, larger colonies of ground-nesting gulls are usually counted from outside the colony as Apparently Occupied Territories, without sight of the nest or eggs. However, the nests themselves are often

counted at smaller colonies, so there is clearly scope for seabird workers to make more of a contribution here.

No accounts are given of the 85 species on Schedule I (rarities), listed in Box 4 on page 18. Thus Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*, Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*, Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*, Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* and Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* are all omitted and there are accounts of only three raptor species. I was disappointed by the omission of *all* Schedule I species. Everyone should be looking out for nests of species that are expanding their breeding range, such as Mediterranean Gull, and many observers would have been helped by pictures of its nest, eggs and young. Some of the lesser rarities on Schedule I could have been given species accounts that left out any material that might have been misused, such as how to find the nests. This need not have lengthened the book. The 18 pages on "Nest recording for the BTO", although important, could have been shortened by leaving out the lengthy lists of codes for county, habitat, nest-building, egg-laying, incubation, young stages, nest success and failure, as well as details of how to submit records. These computer codes are available separately to intending nest recorders, either online or by post, yet 11 pages are devoted to them. This would have been understandable if the book had been intended only for contributors to the Nest Record Scheme, just as the Ringers' Manual is aimed only at ringers. But, as the title says, this book is a Field Guide and it seems to be meant for a wider readership than a Manual.

Under Kittiwake, the paragraph describing the nest is repeated under "Young", so that no description of the young is given. The distribution map for Gannet omits Ailsa Craig and St Kilda, and St Kilda is also not shown on the maps for Fulmar and European Storm-petrel. Wigeon *Anas penelope* and Lesser Black-backed Gull are described as "mainly resident" and Eider *Somateria mollissima* is said to be "increasing". On page 34 we read "There are many ways of marking a nest, but any used should be small and discrete..." Discreet, surely? On page 30 an endoscope is shown being used to look into a nest cavity. I would have liked more information on makes, prices, suppliers, etc.

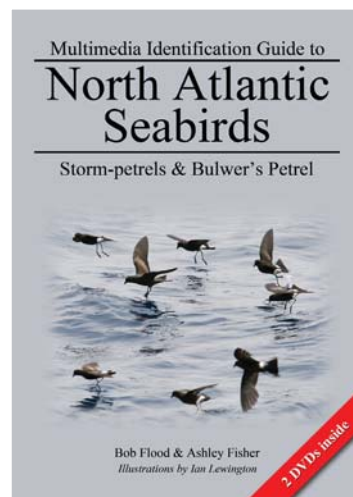
But such small matters are greatly outweighed by the overall high quality of this excellent book. There is a wealth of intriguing detail that comes from the extensive field experience of the authors. My three favourites were as follows. Whistling at small passerine chicks in the nest can make them gape and, if you haven't seen the adults, the pattern of tongue spots is helpful in identification (page 32). The colour diagram on page 33 of six different tongue patterns is both helpful and fascinating. Don't make eye-contact with an incubating bird if you don't want it to fly. It will think that a predator has spotted it (page 30). A male Redstart stops singing when the incubating female has left the nest to feed - watch the female back if you want to find the nest (page 230). Anyone with a serious interest in birds should buy this book. The small size (4.5 x 7.5 inches for oldies) makes it conveniently portable. Try to

guess what the extraordinary cover photograph shows - before you look at the answer on the second page!

Clive Craik

Multimedia Identification Guide to North Atlantic Seabirds. Storm-petrels & Bulwer's Petrel By Bob Flood and Ashley Fisher, illustrations by Ian Lewington. Pelagic Birds & Birding Multimedia Identification Guides, Isles of Scilly. 2011. ISBN 978-0-9568867-0-5. 212 pages, many colour photographs and b/w illustrations. Hardback plus two DVDs. £39.99. Available from www.scillypelagics.com

This is the second in a planned series of multimedia guides to seabirds of the North Atlantic by these authors. It covers ten species (perhaps more depending on taxonomy) including two, Matsudaira's *Oceanodroma matsudairae* and White-bellied Storm-petrels *Fregatta gallaria*, which so far have no accepted records in the North Atlantic. These are



included because of their similarity to species that have definitely occurred and their possible vagrancy to the region.

The book is much more than just a commentary on the two DVDs – it is a nicely produced hardback volume, packed with information, containing numerous good quality colour photographs and Ian Lewington's excellent illustrations. The taxonomy and North Atlantic status of each species is briefly reviewed, followed by an overview of miscellaneous information including morphology, biology, moult strategies, ageing, nest sites, subspecies (including population estimates) and even mythology. The individual species accounts include a clear range map showing breeding colonies and vagrant records as well as the pelagic distribution including the world range for some species such as Matsudaira's Storm-petrel (with just one accepted record just inside the Atlantic, off Cape Town).

It is of course identification, aptly described as 'challenging' in the opening DVD sequences, which forms the meat of this guide. One chapter deals in detail with the many factors that can affect the identification process. Success requires an appreciation of jizz, flight actions, size, shape and behaviour under different conditions, as well as a more analytical study of plumage details. Each factor is dealt with in great detail and with the real insight that comes from careful observation on innumerable pelagic trips. The many photographs (e.g. 11 of White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina* and no less than 19 of Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*) are very helpful and often of superb quality.

A further section covers selected confusion pairs in even more detail, including: European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* versus Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*; Wilson's versus Band-rumped *Oceanodroma castro*; *Fregetta* species; Band-rumped versus Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*; and 'dark-rumped' Leach's versus Swinhoe's. The last covers the thorny issue of whether truly dark-rumped Leach's Storm-petrels occur in the North Atlantic – probably not, it seems, but some would certainly look dark-rumped in normal field conditions. It's good to know that you should still be able to tell them from Swinhoe's using various other features.

The taxonomy of some of the forms is in a state of flux and appendices give useful summaries of the current position within the Band-rumped, *Fregetta* and *Hydrobates* complexes, all of which probably comprise multiple species. Tentative identification features are given for the four proposed North Atlantic Band-rumped taxa, but so far these offer only limited hope for field identification.

The book would be useful as a stand-alone identification guide, but it is the DVD footage that brings the birds to life – suddenly the written descriptions of Wilson's Storm-petrels 'dancing with waves' and the 'windsurfing' *Fregetta* petrels make perfect sense. The authors freely admit that their footage is 'amateur' but in fact the quality is generally very good and only those expecting 'Life of Birds' type close ups in ultra slow motion will be disappointed. The result is much more lifelike – this is what they look like when you are watching

them at sea. Some sequences are of course better than others – the mass of feeding Wilson's and the 'white-bellieds' zipping and tilting along hugging the crests and troughs being personal favourites. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel footage is possibly the most limited but the DVDs include all four known (to the authors, at least) video sequences ever obtained of this elusive species at sea. You can't expect more than that!

If I have a criticism it would be that I find the book a bit cluttered and the layout could possibly have been clearer. This is presumably in part at least because it is an accompaniment to the DVDs rather than a stand-alone ID guide. The Humphrey-Parkes moult terminology might be confusing to some European readers but is well worth learning. It is well suited to birds that nest at times of the year other than the northern spring.

Whether you are in a small boat lurching around in a heavy swell, or watching from a headland into the teeth of a gale, storm-petrel species are often observed under less than ideal conditions. Fore-warned is fore-armed, and experienced observers definitely have the advantage. The best way to gain such experience is to go on as many pelagics as possible in various carefully selected parts of the world. The authors have clearly done this and the breadth and depth of their experience, as well as their passion for their subject, shows in the final product. The next best thing, for observers in the North Atlantic at least, is to watch these DVDs and read the accompanying material.

John P. Martin