

Resenha

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Albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters of the world

By Derek Onley and Paul Scofield
2007, Published by Christopher Helm, London
(ISBN 9780713643329), and Princeton University
Press, Princeton, NJ (ISBN 9780691131320), 240 pp.

This field guide, co-authored by New Zealanders Derek Onley and Paul Scofield, will be of great assistance to ornithologists, birders and others interested in the study and/or observation of albatrosses, petrels and allies (Order Procellariiformes). The book is of convenient size (23.1 x 15.5 cm) and, since it is printed on water-resistant heavy-weight glossy paper, is suitable for use at sea.

In general, the first thing we do when we get a field guide is to look at the illustrations. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that, in books like this, the major contributor is the artist responsible for the plates. Recently, this has often been recognized by placing the illustrator's name ahead of the writer's. Derek Onley has illustrated important field guides to New Zealand birds (e.g., Heather *et al.* 2005), and built a reputation for accuracy and precision.

There are 45 high-quality and beautiful colour plates with more than 500 individual illustrations including adult, immature, juvenile and worn plumages. Some species of petrels exhibit plumage polymorphism (e.g., Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*, Trindade Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana*) with pale, dark and even intermediate forms. Such variation is also fully illustrated. Plates are arranged so that birds of similar appearance, such as White-chinned *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, Spectacled *P. conspicillata*, and Westland Petrels *P. westlandica*, are grouped together, thus allowing direct comparison for precise identifications. The caption notes of the plates focus on key identification features and, in addition to the main text, are useful and facilitate cross reference.

There are some problems, though. The white background for the plates was not a good choice. Mainly white or pale-grey plumaged birds, such as the large albatrosses (*Diomedea* spp.) and fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis* and *F. glacialoides*), simply fade into the background. In this aspect, this book compares unfavourably with other field guides like Peter Harrison's (1983) *Seabirds* or Hadoram Shirihai and Brett Jarrett's (2004) *Complete guide to Antarctic wildlife*.

The book has a comprehensive and readable introduction with an overview of systematics and general characteristics of the four families: Diomedidae (albatrosses and mollymawks),

Procellariidae (petrels and shearwaters), Hydrobatidae (storm-petrels) and Pelecanoididae (diving-petrels). The two-page discussion of species concepts was opportune to a group like Procellariiformes, as their taxonomy seems to be far from settled. The authors follow, in the main, the taxonomy of Brooke (2004), but with some modifications to the smaller shearwaters of the Little *Puffinus assimilis* and Audubon's *P. lherminieri* Shearwaters complex, as suggested by Austin *et al.* (2004). There is also a section on conservation which goes into detail on the many threats faced by these birds.

Each of the 137 species is dealt with at length in respect to its taxonomy, distribution, behaviour, plumage, moult, wear, biometrics and identification. Moreover, this book provides good descriptions of species' 'jizz' (i.e., general impression of size and shape), which is an additional benefit for identification of birds most often seen at long distance when colour pattern can be obscured. For hard to identify groups, there are extra sections describing the best way to distinguish them. There is, for example, a detailed discussion about identification criteria for species within the 'Wandering Albatross complex', namely, Snowy *Diomedea exulans (sensu stricto)*, Tristan *D. dabbenena*, and Antipodean Albatrosses *D. antipodensis*; the latter with two subspecies (n nominate form and *D. a. gibsoni*). All information is summarized in a table containing the main differences among taxa. Indeed, field identification of birds within the 'Wandering complex' is very difficult, and the authors conclude that many large albatrosses observed at sea will not be able to be specifically identified.

That other problematic group, the *Pachyptila* prions, was also discussed in more detail. These are a group of small petrels with very similar plumage patterns; separation at species level is mainly, although not completely, based on the size, shape, structure and colour of the bills (Marchant and Higgins 1990). However, useful identification features, such as bill profiles and under-tail patterns, of these birds are overlooked.

Particularly welcome is the table listing distinctions between the Sooty *Puffinus griseus* and Short-tailed Shearwaters *P. tenuirostris*, which is excellent and constitutes an advance on anything previously published. Identification of the single Short-tailed Shearwater specimen found dead in coastal Bahia, north-east Brazil, in 2005 (see Lima 2006) would have been much easier had this identification tool been available at that time.

For every species there is a 64 x 46 mm colour map showing both the breeding sites and the at-sea range. These maps,

however, have some errors and this is probably one of the weakest points of the book. For instance, it is possible to discern on the map of Amsterdam Albatross *Diomedea amsterdamensis* that its sole breeding site on Amsterdam Island (c. 37°52'S 77°32'E) in the Indian Ocean has been re-located to Kerguelen (49°20'S, 69°20'E), an archipelago lying about 1,000 km southward in the same Ocean. Fortunately, texts on distribution seem to be more accurate, but in some cases conflicting with information on maps.

Apart from 'relatively minor' problems, *Albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters of the world* is an ideal manual for all those users involved with pelagic observations (e.g., on-board scientific observers monitoring long-line fisheries) and/or beach patrols. It contains much new information, is very well illustrated and easy to use. Regarding only the plates, it is an advance on Harrison (1983), and is on a par with work in Marchant and Higgins (1990) and Shirihai and Jarrett (2004); but all of these books cover other groups such as the Sphenisciformes (penguins), Pelecaniformes (boobies, gannets, tropicbirds and frigatebirds) and the marine Charadriiformes (skuas, gulls and terns).

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