

News and notices

BOOK REVIEWS

ANDY SWASH & ROB STILL. 2000 *Bird, Mammals and Reptiles of the Galapagos Islands* Pica Press and Wildlife Guides, Old Basing (UK). ISBN 1-873403-82-8, softback, 168 pages including 53 plates. Price £16.95.

Most birdwatchers visiting the Galapagos Islands also take-in the diverse avifauna of mainland Ecuador. Space and weight are inevitably limited and much of the baggage allowance will be taken up with *The Birds of Colombia* and similar hefty tomes. However, the relatively few (but often endemic) birds of the Galapagos also need identifying. This small, extremely useful, well-produced and relatively cheap guide is far superior to *The Field Guide to the Birds of Galapagos* (Harris 1982, out-of-print but with better maps) and *A Guide to the Birds of Galapagos* (Castro & Phillips 1996) and will be all that most bird-watchers require for their visit to the archipelago.

This guide covers not only the avifauna but also the mammals and reptiles. Each extant species is described and apart from a few lizards and geckos all are illustrated with photographs or paintings. The plates are montages of digitally manipulated images that have been resized to ensure that all the species in every plate are in proportion. This approach is generally successful but in a few instances, notably in some of the cetacean plates, too many images are crammed onto a single page and this results in clutter and some confusion. As acknowledged, the photos come from many parts of the world but this does cause some problems with subspecies. For instance, the Oystercatcher depicted here in flight has substantial white on the primaries (having been photographed in Florida), whereas individuals of the endemic race in Galapagos lack this white. The pale morph Wedge-tailed Shearwater is a 'digitally manipulated image of a dark morph' of a bird at sea off New South Wales, which is hardly for the purist!

The weakest point of the book is the maps since most are too small to be interpreted with any ease. It is impossible to tell from the map (or indeed the text or distribution list) whether the records of the penguin breeding on Floreana or Santiago are included. It would have been much better to have reduced the 12 pages devoted to the types of birds likely to be seen and used the space to present clear maps that are so useful to anyone visiting such a dispersed group of islands.

In general the book is well produced and up-to-date (e.g. the local race of the Masked Booby is accorded its recent promotion to the full species *Nasca*

Booby *Sula granti*). I did, however, note some errors. The labels of Eared Dove and Feral Pigeon in the plate are transposed, the distribution list omits the colony of Wedge-rumped Storm Petrels on Roca Redonda, there is no mention of the Waved Albatross breeding on Isla de la Plata off mainland Ecuador and the Cape Pigeon is a regular, if sporadic, visitor in small numbers and not just a vagrant with a single record. A little more checking would have prevented these irritating mistakes. The term resident is used in a rather unusual way and is applied to the Waved Albatross and Swallow-tailed Gulls that move to Peruvian seas when not breeding; in the former species there are virtually none in Galapagos waters for about 2 months of the year.

The publicity material claims that the book deals with every species ever recorded. Any such claim is a hostage to fortune since South American Sea Lion, Ring-billed and Grey-hooded Gulls, Elegant and Little Terns, and Hornby's Storm Petrel have all been reported from Galapagos yet are not included here. Such rare migrants or vagrants will be of little consequence to most visitors. There are other species which must surely occur that have yet to be documented, for example Arctic Tern and Wilson's Storm Petrel, so readers of *Atlantic Seabirds* may still wish to take Harrison's *Seabirds: an identification guide* when they visit these famed isles. They should, however, certainly also take this new and creditable guide.

Mike Harris