

## Birds of New Guinea: Second Edition

By Thane K. Pratt, and Bruce M. Beehler. 2015. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ, USA, 08540-5237. 528 pages, 49.50 USD, Paper.

Almost 30 years ago I reviewed the first edition of this book and I hailed it as “a worthwhile addition to the world’s field guides.” The original book covered the official list of 708 bird species, plus 17 species that the authors thought should be included. I had a few criticisms – the lack of range maps, a few errors and a relatively high price.

Two of the three original authors have now written a revised edition. This volume covers the geographical entity of New Guinea, the second largest island in the world, located in the southwest Pacific Ocean. The authors avoid using the political terms for the Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua (the west half of the island) and the independent state of Papua New Guinea (the eastern end of the island and its associated offshore islands).

New Guinea was once connected to Australia so it has a similar mammal fauna although its flora is more Asian. New Guinea’s much higher rainfall than its dry, flat and less fertile neighbour has an immense biodiversity. With one-half percent of the world’s land mass it approaches 10 percent of the total species. This is equivalent to the much larger United States or Australia.

The new edition covers 779 bird species, a seven plus percent increase. It has up-to-date, colour coded range maps (for all but the seabirds and rare visitors) and all the illustrations are in colour. Almost all of the first edition plates have been replaced. The old plates, I said, were “professional and essentially accurate.” The new artists have researched plumage details to clarify uncertainties and bring their representation current with any new knowledge. A few vagrants are not depicted, along with the ubiquitous Rock Pigeon – mis-named as Dove, but are fully described. The book, despite 30

years of inflation, is about the same price as the first edition.

The text (separate from the plates) is updated and streamlined. The index gives both the text and plate pages. Be warned, the authors use new English names like Beach Kingfisher, Eastern Osprey and Green Oriole, so the old names have only the text page referenced. This is a very minor inconvenience. Each family and sub-family has an introductory box with much useful information that helps a visitor orient their mind. The authors provide the facts you need to find and identify each bird, including the differences with similar species. In particular, they have added details for subspecies, including their range. This is very important as this region is still in need of research and these birds may be split at some time in the future. Clearly, it will be important to keep good notes.

The introduction has been re-organised and updated. It still provides a fascinating overview of the region’s natural history, exploration, ecology and helpful hints for visitors. This is such rich region; it is well worth reading for any avid birder and, of course, essential for the prospective visitor.

In conclusion, New Guinea is the place to go to get the best increase to your life list. You need to remember the authors say “highly mountainous, most(ly) ... rainforest and (has) logistically difficult conditions.” In addition “the Indonesian Government does not encourage foreigners ... ”

So if you plan to spend the money, to tackle the heat and physical exertion involved in a trip to New Guinea then this excellent book is an essential resource.

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