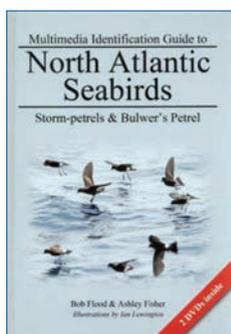


Reviews



North Atlantic Seabirds: storm-petrels & Bulwer's Petrel

By Bob Flood and Ashley Fisher, with illustrations by Ian Lewington

Pelagic Birds & Birding Multimedia Identification Guides, 2011
Hbk, 212pp, many colour photographs and maps, black-and-white illustrations plus two DVD disks of video clips
ISBN 978-0-9568867-0-5 Subbuteo code M21108
£39.99 **BB Bookshop price £35.99**

Since the turn of the century, Bob Flood and Ashley Fisher have been running regular pelagic trips off Scilly, where one of their first achievements was to show that Wilson's Storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* were far more regular than previously thought. Between them they have also managed to identify a number of rare seabirds, including Britain's first accepted Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro* and first accepted at-sea record of Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *O. monorhis*. This new guide summarises much of what they have learnt over the past decade. The subject is essentially storm-petrel identification, with Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* included because of its similarity in appearance. The guide is designed primarily for pelagic, boat-based birders, although it will prove very useful for seawatchers as well.

Besides the three species which occur regularly in British waters – European *Hydrobates pelagicus*, Leach's *O. leucorhoa* and Wilson's Storm-petrels – this guide covers Western Palearctic breeders such as White-faced *Pelagodroma marina* and Madeiran Storm-petrels and Bulwer's Petrel, together with actual (Swinhoe's and Black-bellied Storm-petrels *Fregetta tropica*), and potential vagrants to the Western Palearctic (Matsudaira's Storm-petrel *O. matsudairae* and the 'white-bellied' storm-petrels *F. t. melanoleuca*/*F. grallaria leucogaster*).

The first 41 pages of the book, and a large part of the first of the two DVDs, are a general introduction to storm-petrels and to their identification in particular. Issues such as topography, moult, and feeding modes are discussed, followed by a thorough introduction to jizz, size assessment, plumage aspect, flight behaviour, and structure. The species accounts then cover the same subjects for each species, while also including information

about subspecies, alternative vernacular names, population sizes and conservation status. There is a map for each one showing breeding colonies, normal Atlantic range and extralimital records. These are generally accurate and up to date (although Wilson's Storm-petrel is shown as absent from the Mediterranean Sea, yet there are published records of birds between the Strait of Gibraltar and the central Mediterranean; see *Dutch Birding* 13: 9–10).

I should point out that I saw the text, video and maps of this project at the development stage and made some comments on them. What I did not see were the photos and illustrations. These are really impressive, and contribute to give a 'look and feel' to the book that will certainly appeal to most seabird fanatics. The way that the text and so many photos, maps and illustrations are packed into a small hardback volume without overcrowding is also no small achievement. I particularly liked the black-and-white drawings by Ian Lewington, which are amazingly lifelike and clearly show that he is extremely familiar with these birds. They complement the text perfectly, especially when showing feeding modes.

The addition of two DVDs takes this product into a new dimension. Not only are the birds shown in realistic situations where we can assess the usefulness of the characters mentioned in the text, but we can also appreciate how fundamental the differences between their flight modes are for identification. If you've never seen a Wilson's Storm-petrel 'dancing with waves', a video can communicate this so much better than stills. The analysis of flight and feeding modes on the video and in the accompanying text is, in my view, not only useful to birders but a valuable contribution to seabird science.

Anyone who has ever tried to video storm-

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petrels from a small boat in anything but the calmest conditions will appreciate that the authors have done a tremendous job capturing footage that is so helpful. Many of the clips are excellent, and even the adrenaline-soaked footage of vagrant Swinhoe's Storm-petrels is tremendously helpful for us to learn their flight style. Every clip is fully documented with location, date and the recorder if not Flood or Fisher, while Bob Flood's narration is clear, steady and enthusiastic.

Besides the species accounts, a large part of both the book and the first DVD is dedicated to comparisons of 'confusion pairs'. While the characters described can generally also be found in the species accounts, these one-to-one comparisons of similar species are very helpful in speeding up the learning process. Additional features include a video quiz, an 'ID jogger' that summarises all the main features, and an appendix on recent developments in taxonomy.

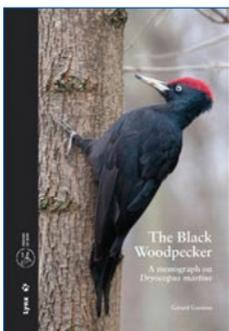
Storm-petrels belong to two ancient lineages that have been separate since around the time when the plesiosaurs disappeared from the seas. And yet, in that time the outward appearance of the northern- and southern-hemisphere groups has diverged relatively little. Wilson's Storm-petrels are similar enough to European Storm-petrels to give us some trouble in learning how to identify them, and yet they do not even belong in the same lineage. Little wonder then that we find the more recently evolved taxa, at a scale of half a million years and less, so difficult to tell apart. In this context it is easy to understand why Flood and Fisher chose to concentrate on established species

and did not cover a range of cryptic 'new' ones, recognised by some authors with a greater focus on sounds, genetics, breeding phenology, etc. For example, the authors have not yet made serious efforts to tackle variation in the band-rumped storm-petrel complex in the way that some observers working in North Carolina are doing. This is a pity, but it is understandable that there is only so much that a self-financed team from the Isles of Scilly can do. What they do offer us is a thorough identification account for the complex as a whole, a summary of recent taxonomic developments, and some discussion of known variation. They also state that they hope to work on separating the different band-rumped populations in a second edition. Variation in European Storm-petrel is treated similarly, and the separation of Atlantic *pelagicus* and Mediterranean *melitensis* is something that may be developed further by this talented team in the future.

For pelagic birders, this guide is an important milestone. It is clearly a must-have, and the most thorough identification guide available for the currently separable storm-petrels and Bulwer's Petrel in the North Atlantic. There is no better way to prepare yourself for those all-important seconds or, if you are lucky, minutes when something really exciting turns up.

Magnus Robb

A more extensive review of this book can be found at www.britishbirds.co.uk/category/book-reviews



The Black Woodpecker: a monograph on *Dryocopus martius*

By Gerard Gorman

Lynx Edicions, 2011

Hbk, 184pp, line-drawings and colour photographs

ISBN 978-84-96553-79-8 Subbuteo code M20950

£19.99 **BB Bookshop price £17.99**

Gerard Gorman will be a name familiar to many readers through his books on birding in eastern Europe and also *Woodpeckers of Europe* (Bruce Coleman, 2004). Here, he devotes a whole book to his favourite species of woodpecker, providing an excellent overview of this most charismatic of birds. He has clearly spent a lot of time in the field watching

Black Woodpeckers *Dryocopus martius* and this shines through in the writing. There are numerous anecdotes and personal observations to complement the information summarised from the literature. The book does not contain the level of detail that one would expect from, say, a Poyser monograph, and there are no tables, graphs or figures. It is aimed at a general audience and while it succeeds admirably, there were times when just a little

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more substance and analysis would have been useful to support the points being made. For those keen to find out more, there is a useful and comprehensive bibliography of the references cited in the text.

Regular visitors to Europe may have noticed that the Black Woodpecker has fared rather well in recent decades, increasing in many countries and expanding its range into some new areas. The bird's adaptability is a recurring theme throughout the book and this species is certainly not confined to patches of untouched ancient woodland as is sometimes thought. True, it does require at least a few large, mature trees in which to excavate its sizeable nest chamber, but it can exploit a very wide range of woodland types, including forests that have been degraded and fragmented by human activity. In some areas it has adapted to life on the urban fringe, making use of parks and other areas of mature trees even in large cities such as Berlin and Brussels.

For birders reluctant to cross the Channel, is there any chance of one day catching up with this species? The author certainly doesn't rule this out. He provides examples where birds have crossed considerable expanses of open water in order to

colonise islands, for example Bornholm in the Baltic, about 30 km from the Danish mainland. And he believes that Britain's lack of carpenter ants *Camponotus*, a favoured food, need not be a hindrance to colonisation, citing the fact that Black Woodpeckers thrive in parts of Europe where these ants are rare or absent, including just across the North Sea in the Netherlands.

While the book is produced to a very high standard, as might be expected from this publisher, it is a little disappointing that the 24 colour photographs are all in a single block near the end, along with the two colour plates and distribution maps. The high-quality photographs have been carefully selected and include detailed and informative captions that would have complemented the text well if placed within the most relevant sections of the book. While the index is limited to species mentioned in the text, the numerous clear sub-headings make locating information on specific subject areas straightforward enough. This is an enjoyable and informative monograph and I for one would be delighted to see Lynx publish more in a similar vein.

Ian Carter



The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland

Edited by Ian Francis and Martin Cook

Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 2011

Hbk, 518pp; many colour photographs and maps

ISBN 978-0-9561126-3-7 Subbuteo code M21148

BB Bookshop price £25.00

My first impressions of this book were good. It's a large, solid hardback, with an attractive dust jacket

on which the Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta* features prominently. Near the beginning is a useful one-page summary, which informs us that during five breeding seasons (2002–06), 348 observers surveyed 2,340 tetrads covering Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray – an 8,700-km² area that includes some of the UK's richest bird habitats. The editors claim that this may be the largest tetrad atlas ever undertaken, and it was, of course, undertaken almost entirely by volunteers.

Following a brief introduction is a description of survey and analytical methods. This includes a justification of the fact that effort was concentrated solely on defining breeding range, with no

attempt to estimate bird numbers. By keeping the methods simple, the organisers aimed to attract as many contributors as possible in order to achieve complete coverage. This objective was met but, interestingly, they recommend that birds should be counted in any future survey.

Next is a copiously illustrated overview of habitats, landscape and land use, before we come to the meat of the book – 189 species accounts, compiled by 60 authors. These accounts, each illustrated by several photographs with emphasis on breeding activity, cover all possible, probable and confirmed breeders. Except for sensitive species, every account has a large map showing tetrad-based distribution in 2002–06. For most species, there are also six smaller maps providing comparisons through time. On two of these, the results of the current atlas – which constitutes the first repeat local atlas in Scotland – are compared with those

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of the 1981–84 atlas (which excluded Moray). Unfortunately, rather than tetrads, the first atlas used 395 recording units of varying shapes and sizes. To compare them, each tetrad surveyed in 2002–06 had to be allocated to one of the 1981–84 units, with less than 100% accuracy owing to overlapping boundaries. Unquantified variation in observer effort between the two surveys created additional difficulties, which are discussed fully. The remaining four maps provide comparisons on a 10-km-square basis, bringing in data from the two published BTO atlases. There is no space here to go into detail about the changes identified, but several of the usual suspects are involved, such as – on the negative side of the equation – Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* and Corn Bunting *E. calandra*. On the other hand, there are some spectacular range increases as well as interesting additions or presumed additions such as Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus* and Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*.

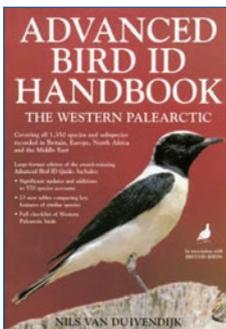
All these maps – which are without exception clear, attractive and easy to interpret – leave relatively little space for words. The species texts are thus concise but also clear and authoritative, with some additional information from 2007–09 being incorporated. In part, their brevity reflects the simplicity of the methodology, which, as stated above, ignored bird numbers. Nevertheless, there is an estimate of the breeding population for each species.

Towards the end of the book, the editors take a look at overall distribution patterns and species richness before going on to analyse changes and discuss conservation issues. I found these sections,

which are packed with information, particularly interesting. I also enjoyed the experience of reading a text free of typos and suchlike (not always guaranteed these days), and I could find very few errors, though I did notice two seemingly contradictory statements about Garganey *Anas querquedula* breeding at Loch of Strathbeg in 2008.

The overall quality of the photographs is high, but there are one or two unfortunate exceptions. In addition, while nearly all bird images are captioned with location and date, location is not always included for those taken in places outside North-East Scotland. More than a quarter of the photographs were taken outside the atlas area, some as far afield as Finland and Canada, and in at least two instances, involving Shore Lark *Ereophila alpestris* and Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (p. 433), the bird illustrated is not of the local subspecies. And while on the subject of subspecies, nothing is said about which race of Redwing *Turdus iliacus* breeds in the area. These are minor quibbles, however. This publication fulfils its mission admirably in providing readers with a clear, up-to-date picture of bird distribution in North-East Scotland – if only for the moment. The current national atlas took over almost as soon as this project left off, of course, with more than a quarter of tetrads being revisited and data on bird numbers collected. Inevitably, this new information will add significantly to the findings presented in this book. In the meantime, however, anyone with an interest in the avifauna of North-East Scotland should, and probably will, buy this volume, which at £25 is reasonably priced by today's standards. It is an impressive achievement.

Tristan ap Rheinallt



Advanced Bird ID Handbook

By Nils van Duivendijk

New Holland, 2011

Pbk, 416pp

ISBN 978-1-78009-022-1 Subbuteo code M20936

£24.99 **BB Bookshop price £21.25**

This is a large-format version of the *Advanced Bird ID Guide*, which has already been reviewed in *BB* (see *Brit. Birds* 103: 680–681, also 104: 92). This volume is not only larger (the first version was approx. 13 × 21 cm with 304 pp., whereas this one is 19 × 26 cm with

416 pp.), but contains 23 new tables (which provide a handy direct comparison of difficult species, such as ringtail Pallid *Circus macrourus* and Montagu's Harriers *C. pygargus*, Booted *Hippolais caligata* and Sykes's Warblers *H. rama*) and a checklist of the birds of the Western Palearctic. By and large, the extra size is explained by a larger font size, which makes this version

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easier to read, while there is more room on the pages to add your own updates, references, etc. as new information becomes available or ID characters are refined. The author's introduction makes it very clear that this is, and will always be, a work in progress.

The publishers claim that there are 'significant updates to more than 570 species accounts' in the Handbook. I think that you could quibble with their use of 'significant' – for many of the accounts that I checked, the changes are rather small. For example, for the accounts of Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*, Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* and Pallas's Reed Bunting *Emberiza pallasi* the only real changes are to replace 'cream-coloured' with 'buff' in five instances in the three accounts (a refinement of colour transcriptions is a general

theme). For other species, the revisions are a little more extensive – for example, for *homeyeri* Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* there are three extra lines dealing with first-winters and intergrades. But, overall, the text is pretty similar.

The idea of the larger version is that it is a more convenient format to have at home on a shelf, whereas the smaller one might live in the car or be the one to take on trips. There is a good deal of sense in that, particularly if you haven't bought two copies already. I like this book a lot, so I already have two copies of the first one, in which case there is perhaps less urgency to shell out for the handbook version.

Roger Riddington



Blogging for Nature

By Mark Avery

Pbk, 277pp

Subbuteo code M21147

£9.92 **BB Bookshop price £9.50**

Mark Avery is the recently departed Director of Conservation at the RSPB, whose regular blogs

on the RSPB website provided an insider's thought-provoking views on nature conservation and politics. Just under a fifth of this prodigious output (143 blogs out of 750 posted) from 2009 to 2011 are now available in this volume, with updates and amendments where appropriate.

For readers still hazy about 'blogs' and 'blogging', a weblog is an online diary. Many birders use their blogs to share days in the field with a wider audience. Some are breathless accounts of long-distance twitches while others are more political – or more comical. Mark Avery used his RSPB blog to connect with the Society's membership, the wider conservation community – and politicians. With one million members the RSPB has considerable political clout so Mark's blog was required reading for environment ministers. Indeed, the former Environment Secretary, Hilary Benn, provides a foreword that underlines how Mark's

'thought for the day' was always pored over by policy-makers.

Whether it was agri-environment subsidies, the outrage of Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* persecution in the northern uplands or our disappearing summer migrants, Mark had something thoughtful to contribute. And his daily contributions continue on his website (www.markavery.info) and on Twitter (@MarkAvery).

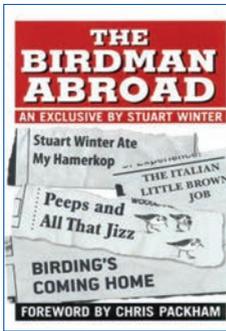
Blogging for Nature is not available in the shops (and there is no ISBN number) but you can buy it through the *BB Bookshop* at a very reasonable £9.50. It will provide some very stimulating reading well into the New Year. Whether you dip into it or read from cover to cover, by the time you finish you'll be extremely well informed on all the key conservation debates of our times. In addition, there are ten tips on how to blog – and how to respond to the comments, positive and negative, that all must-read blogs attract.

Adrian Pitches

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The Birdman Abroad

By Stuart Winter

New Holland, 2011

Pbk, 224 pages; 16 line-drawings

ISBN 978-1-84773-692-5 Subbuteo code M20937

£7.99 **BB Bookshop price £5.99**

Last year, Stuart Winter wrote *Tales of a Tabloid Twitcher* and kept many of us entertained with his zany

sense of humour. Now he has gone through many diaries to reveal his antics when travelling abroad. There is a real art to writing in a humorous way and Stuart has it in spades. This book is not a comedy, but he finds the funny side in everything he sees and, as a Fleet Street journalist, he knows how to tell a tale.

The journeys cover a multitude of overseas locations – several trips to Mallorca (surely Majorca in Fleet Street lingo?), Crete, Cyprus, Israel, The Gambia, Cameroon, Malawi, Panama, the USA (including California, Arizona, New Jersey and New York), and the Falkland Islands.

Every trip finds Stuart seeking new birds and meeting crazy people along the way. I am not sure I believe all of the tales he tells, and clearly there has been a fair amount of embellishment, as the stories have got taller and taller! How many times now have I heard the story about the ageing American lady birdwatchers who were perturbed by the fact that they needed to see the ‘jizz’ of smaller waders? The old jokes are the best!

But this is a very witty book and I found myself laughing out loud several times. Plenty of birds are seen and we meet everyone along the way from farmers in the Gambia and fat ladies in America to Prince Charles at Clarence House. It is a seriously funny read.

Keith Betton

DVD Guide to Birdwatching in Europe

Filmed and narrated by Paul Doherty

Bird Images, 2011

DVD, running time 3 hours 15 mins

Subbuteo code V60059

BB Bookshop price £16.00

In common with Paul Doherty’s previous DVDs this is a highly professional production, focusing on ten birding locations in Europe and featuring 255 species – many of them appearing more than once. It starts with a trip to the bitterly cold Netherlands in February, where the main interest is geese at Lauwersmeer National Park, with extra material taken from other sites. Here we get to see the birds up close and in detail, the images being supported by an informative commentary explaining the plumage features of the main goose species. Raptors are also studied, and again we learn how to separate species, where they have probably come from, and how long they may stay.

Moving on through the year, the DVD actually leaves Europe for raptor and wader migration at Eilat, on Israel’s Red Sea coast, in March, before visits to Extremadura in Spain for the early breeding season, followed by the Pyrenees for

higher-altitude birding. The Greek island of Lesvos is featured in great detail, before we go north to eastern Poland in May, to the Białowieża Forest and Biebrza Marshes. Central Finland provides an absolute owl-fest in June, preceding Varanger Fjord in northern Norway for summering seabirds and nesting auks. July, August and September are not featured, but October is a busy month, starting with a trip to Falsterbo in southern Sweden. Autumn migration is in full swing and the enormous numbers of migrating passerines is amazing – here the power of DVD footage really shows itself as finches, tits and pipits swarm past, almost colliding with the camera on occasions. The rest of October is spent back in Israel, with migration in the Beit She’an valley.

The ten chapters can be viewed separately, and the facility to select a species from the menu and go straight to the appropriate footage is very

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useful. There is a simple map at the start of each chapter, but by comparison with some more specific products on the market, local site information is at a minimum. But if you are looking for European holiday ideas, then this is a great DVD to provide inspiration, even though it

selects just a few sites from eight countries. There are 50 countries in Europe so the scope for more DVDs is considerable and I look forward to seeing them.

Keith Betton



Birds – magic moments

By Markus Varesvuo

New Holland, 2011

Hbk, 160pp

ISBN 978-1-78009-075-7 Subbuteo code M21055

£19.99 **BB Bookshop price £17.99**

Markus Varesvuo has a reputation as an exceptional bird photographer although, coming from Finland, he has plenty of competition from a country that seems to have more than its fair share of outstanding bird photographers. This book is clear evidence as to why he has such a high reputation.

This is a coffee-table book – what else would you expect from a book of photographs? But being landscape format means that it does not fit comfortably in the bookcase. The book contains over 150 images, most of which are full-page size, and some are more than that, and the text has been kept to the minimum, with just a short paragraph describing each photograph. Readers with a photographic background will also want to turn to the end of the book, where the photographic details are given: camera body, lens, exposure details, date and location (many, but by no means all were taken in Finland).

And, yes, the photographs are superb, all living up to the 'magic moments' of the title. The majority feature birds in action – flying, fighting, displaying, singing and feeding – practically every aspect of bird behaviour is here. Many of the images involve water, often used to good effect with much spray, and snow. Spray is in the form of splashes as birds hit the water – a Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* landing on its nesting lake, fish

in bill, a plume of spray thrown up behind, and with one of the finest reflections I have seen in a bird photograph. There is as much detail in the reflection (including the fish) as in the image of the bird itself. Almost inevitably there is the obligatory image of a fishing Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* although in this case it is the splash which forms the focus of the photograph, not the bird, with only the wings visible to explain the source of the splash! My favourite snowscape is an image with two immaculately white, though black-masked, Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta* sitting on rocks, with three Caribou *Rangifer tarandus* out of focus in the distance. Several images feature falling snow; one of these forms the cover photograph of a Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* in flight, surrounded by snowflakes, with a cold blue woodland background. Add to this images of arctic owls hunting in the snow, and mix this with bee-eaters and vultures from the warmer parts of Europe, and you have as fine a collection of bird images as I have seen for a long time.

This book will enhance Markus's already very substantial reputation, and will surely inspire another generation of bird photographers to set even higher standards!

Richard Chandler

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook 2012

Edited by David Cromack

Buckingham Press, 2011

Pbk, 328 pp, many black-and-white illustrations, maps, etc.

ISBN 978-0-9569876-1-7

Subbuteo code M21026

£16.50 **BB Bookshop price £14.75**

Having evolved steadily over more than 30 years to meet the information needs of birdwatchers and all those involved in the wider birding community, the yearbook is for many an essential purchase. In addition to all the usual features (county, national and international directories, a trade directory, details of reserves and bird observatories, check-lists, tide times, etc.) there is a review of birding news, birding websites, bird books and much more.

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Storm petrel, any member of about 20 species of seabirds constituting the family Hydrobatidae, or sometimes considered as Oceanitidae (order Procellariiformes). Ranging in length from about 13 to 25 centimetres (5 12 to 10 inches), all are dark gray or brown, sometimes lighter below, and often. They breed on islands along the coasts of North and South America, in the eastern and southern Atlantic, and throughout the Pacific. A single whitish egg is incubated by both parents, which come and go by night and so are rarely seen by man and other potential predators. Like many exclusively nocturnal birds, petrels are highly vocal at the colony.