

BOOK REVIEWS—RESEÑAS DE LIBROS—RESENHAS DE LIVROS

Edited by John G. Blake

(To whom books for review should be sent)

Parrots of the World. — Joseph M. Forshaw, Illustrated by Frank Knight. 2010. Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 336 pp. ISBN 9780691142852. Costs \$29.95. e-Book ISBN 9781400836208. Costs \$29.95.

The family Psittacidae contains more threatened species than any other bird family (Bennett & Owens 1997, Birdlife International 2011). As a result there is a great need for information to inform conservation action. In the past twenty years, the amount of research on parrots has increased dramatically as researchers and conservationists from around the world, especially those from parrot-range countries, have focused a great deal of effort on this highly endangered group. Parrots, like nearly all other bird families worldwide, are threatened by habitat loss and climate change. However, these threats are compounded by intense direct exploitation for the domestic and international pet trade. This trade has created a need for efficient enforcement and made it possible for parrots to appear in captivity or in the wild hundreds of thousands of kilometers away from their native ranges. These captive individuals have also created many opportunities for captive breeding to provide pets for the commercial trade and birds for reintroduction and other conservation initiatives. However, field research, enforcement, and effective captive breeding all require accurate identification of parrot taxa.

With the publication of “Parrots of the World” in 1973, Joseph Forshaw provided the first compilation of our knowledge of the birds of the order Psittaciformes (Forshaw 1973). This encyclopedic tome, along with its subsequent revisions including the landmark third edition in 1989, provided detailed descriptions of taxonomy, appearance, range, behavior, ecology, conservation status, habitat use, subspecies, and more. For this work, Forshaw drew from personal observation, exhaustive museum work, the published literature and unpublished correspondence with nearly all the experts in the field at the time (Forshaw 1989). The work is clearly referenced providing the reader the source of each observation and supposition in the work. The 1989 edition is still a classic and contains unique information unavailable in any other publication. The artwork in these editions is exquisite both in its attention to detail and its artistic beauty. However, it was not created to facilitate identification. In 2006, he produced “Parrots of the World: an Identification Guide” as a handbook for researchers, government officials, museum curators and aficionados who need to rapidly and accurately identify parrots to specific or subspecific levels (Forshaw 2006). This work moved away from the model of the earlier volumes which sought to compile all known information on parrot species and focused on providing information principally useful for identifica-

tion. This 2006 handbook includes only the names, alternative names, distribution, description, distinguishing features, similar species, subspecific descriptions, habitats and status, habits, calls and suggested viewing localities for each species. The illustrations of Frank Knight, while hardly artistic, are crisp, clean, and accurate and accomplish their goal of facilitating identification. Also of note is that this handbook shows illustrations of nearly all species in flight from both above and below, a characteristic which is very useful for identifying psittacines as they fly overhead. However, as Forshaw himself rightly points out, the size and weight of this 22 cm x 31 cm tome greatly limits its usefulness as a field identification guide.

With the 2010 publication of “Parrots of the World” as part of the Princeton Field Guides series, the author has provided a guide that can be used either in the office or in the field to identify parrots anywhere in the world. The book is based on the information and illustrations from the 2006 handbook and incorporates relevant taxonomic updates. The six-page introduction includes summary information on parrot identification, vocalization, habitat use, habits and status and conservation. These sections summarize the variation of 350+ species in a few paragraphs on each topic and are by nature quite general, but they do provide a useful introduction to the range of variation within psittacines and the complex conservation issues they face. The species descriptions and range maps are all contained on the pages facing the plates, making this guide quick and easy to use in the field. What I find most laudable about this guide is that the massive reduction in size and weight compared to the 2006 handbook was accomplished with only a minor reduction in useful content. The 2010 edition contains the length measurement, distinguishing features, calls, distribution, IUCN and CITES status, similar species, subspecific descriptions, and

viewing localities for each species. The habits and habitats are presented for a minority of species, especially where this information can facilitate identification. Only the alternative names seem to be completely omitted from this streamlined version.

The distribution maps effectively use color and text labels to show the distributions of the species and their principle subspecies. Unfortunately, the maps do not include international boundaries making it difficult for the reader to orient themselves and determine distributional limits in inland areas. As the author acknowledges, the creation of accurate range maps is very difficult due to the highly incomplete knowledge of avian distributions, especially in the tropics. However, in a fairly large number of instances (including 4 of 16 macaw species) the illustrated range is inconsistent with the range as described in the text. This an unfortunate type of error that should be avoidable.

The plates contain Knight’s uncluttered and accurate illustrations of all species perched in profile and nearly all species in flight. The flight illustrations are very useful given that this version can be taken out in to the field. The work includes two plates which illustrate 10 extinct and presumed extinct species, a grim reminder of the conservation threats facing so many species in this family.

The taxonomy is based on Dickinson’s (2003) checklist of the birds of the world, a widely accepted starting point for avian taxonomy (Gill & Donsker 2011). Forshaw varies from the mainstream on some Latin species names and species versus subspecies decisions. He is quite liberal in his acceptance of new *Aratinga* and *Pyrrhura* splits, but continues to lump *Amazona oratrix* and *A. auropal-liata* with *A. ochrocephala* as Yellow-crowned Amazon. The latter decision, while defensible given the current taxonomic confusion (Eberhard & Bermingham 2004, Russello & Amato 2004), contradicts the established taxonomy

of many leading ornithological organizations (AOU 1998, Dickinson 2003, Gill & Donsker 2011, SACC 2011) and proposing a return to subspecific status for these taxa could have strong negative impacts on the conservation of the endangered Central American taxa in this group.

While the scientific names and taxonomic variations appear relatively minor, the use of English names in this work is most troubling. Since the 1973 edition of *Parrots of the World*, Forshaw has used an odd, and to me highly unpredictable, hodgepodge of English names. For Neotropical species in particular he tends to use names common in the aviculture literature. However, he is inconsistent with this rule. For example he uses the aviculture name of Green-winged Macaw instead of Red-and-green Macaw for *Ara chloropterus* yet uses Chestnut-fronted, Great Green, and Blue-winged Macaw instead of the aviculture equivalents of Severe, Buffon's and Illiger's Macaws. He has stuck with the term "conure" instead of the nearly universal "parakeet" for the members of the genera *Aratinga*, *Pyrrhura* and allies despite the fact that these genera are neither taxonomically monophyletic nor similar in behavior, ecology or vocalizations. In one apparently odd choice, he adopts the name Mountain Conure for the newly described *Aratinga alticola* instead of Chapman's "Conure" which would have followed from the name of Chapman's Parakeet proposed by the original author (Arndt 2006) and accepted by the International Ornithologists' Union (Dickinson 2003). While such details are not usually relevant in a review such as this, it creates additional confusion by having both a Mountain Parakeet (*Bolborhynchus aurifrons*) and a Mountain Conure in the same volume and it illustrates the author's lack of regard for established English names. Many other examples exist in the work which may frustrate non-scientific users who attempt to cross-reference English names among this

book, local field guides and online references. Over the last 40 years, the ornithological establishment has worked hard to standardize avian taxonomy. I feel that it is time that book publishers pressure the authors of avian monographs and field guides to follow the English names as established by professional organizations except under unusual and clearly justified circumstances. With all the standardization work underway, we need to stop creating new names with each new publication.

The title of this work, "Parrots of the World," suggests that this book could be an update of the author's classic 1989 3rd edition of *Parrots of the World*. Readers purchasing this volume with that expectation will be sorely disappointed because as mentioned above, the 1989 edition has artistic plates and exhaustive text and the 2010 edition has utilitarian plates and minimalist text. It is unfortunate that the author and publisher did not provide the buyer with a clearer indication of these differences in the title.

There are two other major works which cover all known parrot species: Collar's (1997) chapter in the *Handbook of Birds of the World*, and Juniper and Parr's (1998) "Parrots: a guide to parrots of the world." Both of these works differ greatly from the Forshaw's works. Both are more summarized and more up to date than the species descriptions in Forshaw (1989) but provide more detailed sections on appearance, ecology, status, and distribution than Forshaw's more recent publications (2006, 2010). Collar's excellent species accounts, highly informative introductory section, and stunning photos come in an expensive heavy volume and provide only a single perched illustrations for each species, making it a good library reference but less useful as an identification tool. Juniper and Parr's work is intermediate in size and weight, provides excellent text but the illustrations are highly variable in quality and not presented in

a way that facilitates identification (for more information see Brightsmith 1999). Readers looking for detailed descriptions of the ecology and conservation of each parrot species should purchase Forshaw's 1989 work along with the more affordable Juniper & Parr (1998). However, those looking for a pure identification guide will be best served by Forshaw's new 2010 field guide.

This field guide is the size of a typical tropical bird field guide (Stiles & Skutch 1989, Perlo 2009, Schulenberg *et al.* 2010), so while not small, is relatively easy to pack and transport. People traveling by air will find it convenient to take in their luggage (unlike the early Forshaw volumes or Collar's work). However, most will leave it behind during hikes, choosing to consult it upon their return. Those working in markets, museums, border inspection, aviculture, etc., will find the guide sufficiently small and portable that they will be comfortable taking it along to compare directly with individual birds to be identified. As a result, Forshaw's 2010 *Parrots of the World* accomplishes its stated goal of providing the best available option for those needing to reliably identify parrots either in the wild, the museum or captivity. — Donald J. Brightsmith, Schubot Exotic Bird Health Center at Texas A&M University, TAMU 4467, College Station, Texas 77843-4467, USA. *E-mail*: dbrightsmith@cvm.tamu.edu

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