

BOOK REVIEWS—RESEÑAS DE LIBROS—RESENHAS DE LIVROS

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Birds and Mammals of Coastal Patagonia.—Graham Harris. 1998. Princeton University Press, Princeton. xviii + 231 pp., 33 color plates, 30 black and white text figures, 251 species distribution maps, two appendices, glossary, index. ISBN 0-691-05831-8 (cloth). US\$65.00.

As indicated in the blurb jacket, "This is the first guidebook to the birds and mammals of the coastal region of Patagonia, a vast area at the southern tip of South America ... With an area covering over a half million square miles, Patagonia is larger than Spain and Portugal combined." In this very attractive and beautifully produced book Patagonian resident naturalist and artist Graham Harris describes and illustrates 185 species of birds (numbered 1–185, pages 23–118), and 61 species of mammals (numbered consecutively after the birds 186–246, pages 121–167) that occur in "coastal Patagonia." Harris (Preface page xv) defines this region as "the part of eastern or coastal Patagonia that extends from Península Valdés to the Strait of Magellan, and from 70° W as far as one may see from shore looking eastward over the Atlantic Ocean," adding: "This area corresponds to the eastern parts of the provinces of Chubut and Santa Cruz in Argentina."

The core of the text consists of the species accounts, ranging from about one fourth of a page (for example *Sicalis luteola* and *Akodon iniscatus*) to several pages (for instance *Spheniscus magellanicus* and *Lama guanicoe*). In a

chapter entitled "Plan of the Book" (pages 3–6) Harris tells us that "the more common or conspicuous species have been treated in a more detailed fashion." Thus the description of the behavior of the large and conspicuous *Pterocnemia pennata* takes more than half a page, whereas that of the small and inconspicuous *Asthenes patagonica* is dealt with in less than a quarter of a page. In Harris' own words "The result is a deliberate disproportion in the text in favor of the birds and mammals that I have felt the reader would most like to know about" (page 3). I regret this choice. Even though it has a drab and inconspicuous plumage, a species like *Asthenes patagonica* is conspicuous in behavior as it "builds very noticeable, soccer-ball-sized twig nests," as Harris himself points out (page 103). In addition, the range of *Asthenes patagonica* is "restricted to northern Patagonia" (page 103). As I found out from personal experience many eco-tourists in the Valdés Peninsula are struck by the numerous huge stick nests of dull plumaged but endemic small birds like the furnariids *Asthenes patagonica* and *Eremobius phoenicurus* and are fascinated when they are told about these birds's size, behavior, and distribution. Indeed, such species should be brought to the attention of readers who would not otherwise appreciate their significance. I thus fear that the disproportion in treatment may somehow devalue less conspicuous creatures that are nevertheless of great biological interest because of their

behavior or of conservation concern because of their localized or endemic distribution.

Harris's guide is richly illustrated. The black and white line drawings that enhance the accounts of several species, for example of *Pterocnemia pennata* and *Eubalaena australis*, are simply exquisite and are undoubtedly Harris's best work. I only wish he had included many more of them, especially perhaps drawings of some of the smaller birds just cited, with sketches of their steppe-like habitat and their extraordinary nests, although, to be fair, some of these appear as distant backgrounds on Plate 21. The 33 color plates, which are unfortunately grouped in the center of the book and thus make comparisons of text with plates somewhat awkward, vary in quality and probably therefore also in effectiveness as aids to field identification. Thus, some of the oceanic birds represented on plates 3–5 are, in my opinion, less successful than other species, such as the gulls and most landbirds. In some instances the species depicted do not look quite like the bird one sees in the field, for example the huge-headed and -billed *Pseudoseisura gutturalis* on Plate 21, or the odd-positioned *Picooides mixtus* on Plate 19. By contrast, I like his *Larus scoresbii* on Plate 17, his *Guira guira* on Plate 19, and his *Sturnella loyca* on Plate 25 (and, among the mammals, his *Dolichotis patagonum* on Plate 27 or his *Lama guanicoe* on Plate 31). Harris is very good at vignettes. I especially like the family group of Darwin's Rheas on Plate 1, the flock of Sanderlings on Plate 16, the flycatchers hovering with dangling legs on Plate 22, or the group of three Maras on Plate 27.

I noticed a few errors and omissions. For instance, on Plate 23, species number 4 should be *Pseudocolopteryx flaviventris* and number 6 should be *Serpophaga subcristata*, not the other way around. The book describes only one pipit, *Anthus correndera*, whereas a second species, *Anthus furcatus*, is locally common at Punta Delgada on the Valdés Peninsula, a

much visited site. In this regard, note that one of the two Correndera Pipits of Plate 25, number 2b, looks in fact more like either *Anthus furcatus* or *Anthus bellmayri*, except for its long hallux claw, characteristic of *correndera*. One could quibble with comments about the status of some species. To give a couple of examples, I would like to know the factual basis for the "Uncommon" status of the Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata* (page 90). On the other hand, *Phrygilus carbonarius*, stated on page 116 to be "Uncommon" is, in fact, rather common locally along some coastal areas and even more common a few kilometers inland from the coast. In some cases, information in the text and plates does not seem to match my own experience. Thus, the voice of *Geositta antarctica*, transcribed as "witik witik witik" (page 100), would appear to sound very much like that of *Geositta cunicularia*, rendered (page 99) as "Wheet-ta-wheet-ta-wheet-ta...". To my knowledge, whereas *cunicularia* indeed emits a loud, rather musical, bitonal and oft-repeated "weettew-weettew-weettew...", by contrast *antarctica*'s voice is less loud, and sounds like a harsh, guttural, yet also repeated "tchrrrr-tchrrrr-tchrrrr-tchrrrr...", lacking the rather melodious "ew" note. (Incidentally, the information published by Harris about the voice of *antarctica* seems to go back to Ridgely and Tudor's description of *antarctica*'s song as "weetuk-weetuk-weetuk-weetuk-weetuk", so given on page 28 of their "The Birds of South America, Volume II, The Suboscine Passerines".) In addition to this possible confusion, note that the *Geositta* on the ground, number 12 on Plate 21, given as *cunicularia*, in fact looks more like *antarctica*. The flight illustrations, however, show the right species: *cunicularia* with the chestnut wing bar (number 12) and *antarctica* with the buffy wing bar (number 13).

Several features increase the usefulness of "A Guide to the Birds and Mammals of Coastal Patagonia." They include a section

describing the topography, geology, climate, and habitats of eastern Patagonia (pages 7–15, with a map, curiously omitting the Río Chubut, mentioned several times in the text; and an attractive black and white line drawing of some common shrubs, unfortunately without a scale), a chapter on "Migrations and Wildlife Viewing" including a brief list of reserves and protected areas (pages 16–19), and a Glossary (pages 173–174). The Index (pages 219–231) gives the English, Spanish, and Latin names of birds and mammals, and also conveniently refers to plate numbers. The black and white, computer produced distribution maps (pages 177–218, curiously unpaginated) show the ranges of the species discussed in the book, labeled with their Latin names and identified with the numbers used in the text.

Harris's new guidebook to the birds of coastal Patagonia can be used together with Fjeldsá and Krabbe's earlier guide to the "Birds of the High Andes" (which I reviewed in *"The Auk"* 109: 683–686, 1992; see also *"Ornitología Neotropical"* 8: 210, 1997). As the Fjeldsá and Krabbe volume includes inland Patagonia, the geographic coverage of these two volumes does not really overlap. Interestingly, I found that some of Harris's artwork is somewhat similar to some of Fjeldsá's, for instance birds of prey (compare Plate 11 in Harris with Plates XI–XIII in Fjeldsá and Krabbe). On the other hand, Fjeldsá's rendering of most birds, especially perhaps water birds, is more like what one sees in the field. Surprisingly, Fjeldsá and Krabbe's important book is not cited in Harris's list of Recommended Reading (Appendix B, pages 171–172) or in his Bibliography (pages 175–176).

The question of what language Harris' book was written in is intriguing. A cryptic remark on page xviii is of no help. Harris thanks "Keith Franklin [who], without complaint, translated the manuscript into Span-

ish." Does this mean that this book was written in English and will be published in a Spanish version? I very much hope so, and furthermore that it will be made widely available in Argentina in general and in Patagonia in particular. Given the fact that Harris is deeply interested in conservation, I would think that a Spanish edition of his guide would be extremely important, as it would call attention to the avian and mammalian treasures that need protection in coastal Patagonia. As Harris himself points out, the increase in tourism in the area is a good thing, provided that it does not get out of control.

Ornithologists going to Patagonia can now take along at least four identification books: Harris's 15.5 x 23.5 x 2.5 cm guidebook (unfortunately it hardly fits in a pocket), Fjeldsá's and Krabbe's mammoth volume (but it does not treat oceanic birds), the pocket-sized illustrated checklist by de la Peña and Rumboll ("Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica," which I reviewed in *Ornitol. Neotrop.* 9: 227–228, 1998), and Narosky and Yzurieta's classic "Birds of Argentina & Uruguay, a Field Guide" (see *Ornitol. Neotrop.* 9: 215, 1998). Birders might need all four books, as they complement each other in geographic and taxonomic coverage, and have different treatments and very different iconographies. Because it discusses the birds and mammals of a part of coastal southern South America that figures prominently on tourist itineraries, Harris's book will undoubtedly be used extensively by international travelers who especially plan to see the large Magellanic Penguin colonies at Punta Tombo, Cabo Dos Bahías, or Cabo Vírgenes, or to view the spectacular reproductive antics of Right Whales at Puerto Pirámide but are less interested in small brown passerines or small brown rodents.

Setting aside my criticisms as a reviewer, I certainly look forward to taking Graham Har-

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ris's very personal book with me on my next fieldtrip to coastal Patagonia. Indeed, I wish I could have had it along on earlier trips. As William Conway, of New York's Wildlife Conservation Society and an old Patagonia

hand, wrote in his Foreword, Harris brought "to this book a unique combination of credentials: a scientist's perception, an artist's eye, and a Patagonian's insight."—François Vuilleumier.