

Book Review

Birds of New Guinea: Including Bismarck Archipelago and Bougainville, 2nd Edition

By Phil Gregory

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As the 2017 first edition (Gregory 2017, 1st edition) is reviewed in this journal (Bishop 2017), I principally deal with differences between it and this 2nd edition, the softback of which is the same overall size and weight as the 1st. Changes to the status of some species appear under the section Conservation. Every species now has a QR code to be scanned to access data, images, and sounds archived at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. This begs the question over what percentage of the vast, remote, area of New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago and Bougainville is internet available? This 2nd edition includes 41 species more than the 1st edition, which, together with QR codes, accounts for 13 pages additional to the 1st edition. The, updated, small distribution maps are on the same page as the species illustrations, unlike the (same-sized) maps in Pratt & Beehler (2015) that are on opposite text pages. As in the 1st edition, every map has an unexplained blank 4-mm-wide column down the left side, divided by four

horizontal lines. These lines do not match lines of latitude, if the top of the map is supposed to be the equator, but, even if they did, they would be of little value. Thus, maps could have been 10% longer. An expanded Index includes all widely used alternative English bird names.

There are 1800 bird figures on 216 colour plates (1780 and 211 respectively in 1st edition) and, given that 25 artists contributed, consistency is reasonably good. It cannot be easy to author a guide for which the illustrations were not produced, as they were done for the various volumes of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992–2013). I find the predominantly much larger bird figures in Pratt & Beehler's plates preferable to the smaller ones in Gregory. Colour saturation in most plates and figures is slightly stronger than in the 1st edition but is weaker in a few cases (e.g. New Guinea Flightless Rail *Megacrex inepta*) in the 2nd edition. Figures in the 2nd edition often face the opposite direction to that in the 1st, perhaps to give the plates a fresh look. Colour plates in Pratt & Beehler are all bound together in the first half of the book, with the main species account texts in the second half, whereas those in Gregory are throughout, with species accounts on opposite text pages. There are fewer species on each plate than in Pratt & Beehler despite figures being smaller, e.g. the *Meliphaga–Microptilotis* honeyeater complex occupies 1 plate in Pratt & Beehler but two and a quarter plates in Gregory's 2nd edition, and the estrildid finches 2 plates in the former but four in Gregory.

Updated taxonomy applied is based upon the International Ornithological Committee world list version 15.1, whereas Gregory also considered the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* and *BirdLife International Digital Checklist of the Birds of the World* (version 9). Following genetic analysis, resulting in taxonomic reassignment, I find it disconcerting to find Gregory therefore acknowledges three species of 'pitohui' in the family Pachycephalidae (two being considered to be shrike-thrushes in the 1st edition). These were once species of *Pitohui* (Mayr 1967; Sibley & Monroe 1990) but no longer, and four others still in *Pitohui* are now within the Oriolidae. This is surely a confusing, inappropriate, use of common names! A new order of colour plates reflects new taxonomic opinion. I cannot detail all, but some major changes are: waterfowl appear between ratites and megapodes; caprimulgids, apodids, bustard and cuckoos precede pigeons but rails follow them; the waders precede the seabirds. Confusion caused by some seabird species being separated from the bulk of seabirds in the 1st edition is largely resolved in the 2nd, although the stork still appears among them. Whereas owls preceded diurnal birds of prey in the 1st

edition, their positions are now reversed. The order that some birds of prey appear, notably goshawks, is changed. The Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris* complex is revised to recognise the species Torresian *T. sordidus*, Louisiade *T. colonus* and Melanesian Kingfisher *T. tristrami* (with four distinct subspecies of the latter illustrated). The North Moluccan Pitta *Erythropitta rufiventris* appears in the 2nd edition but the taxon *rufiventris* did not appear in the 1st, resulting from splitting it from what was the Red-bellied and now is the Papuan Pitta *E. macklotii* species complex.

The White-eared Catbird *Ailuroedus buccoides* of the 1st edition is now split into three similar species and the Black-eared Catbird *A. melanotis* into five even more similar species (cf Irestedt *et al.* 2016; Gregory 2019) – making identification difficult because distributions are not well known. Birds seen between the ranges of taxa would have to be collected to confirm formal identification (cf Frith 2017). The order of honeyeaters is changed in various ways. Warblers, scrubwrens and gerygones follow honeyeaters, to be followed by babblers, logrunner, satinbirds and berrypeckers, opposite to the 1st edition. The Blue-capped Irit *Irita kowaldi* is removed from between fantails and monarch flycatchers to be next to melampittas, after the crows, as forming the monotypic family Iritidae. The wagtails, thrushes, flowerpeckers and sunbirds precede estrildid finches, contrary to the 1st edition. What was a subspecies of Hunstein's Mannikin *Lonchura hunsteini* in the 1st edition is now the species New Hanover Mannikin *L. nigerrima*.

Thankfully, Gregory acknowledges only one Trumpet Manucode *Phonygammus keraudrenii*, rather than nine species (cf Cracraft 1992). The latter, universally unaccepted, action would create confusion even greater than the splitting of the Black-eared Catbird. Given the very similar morphology of Trumpet Manucode subspecies, the elevating of them to species would have to involve producing a colour plate of nine all-but-identical 'species'. Such daunting taxonomy is impractical and, in my opinion, a disservice to ornithologists, birdwatchers, and lay people. Gregory, however, states that geographical variation in Trumpet Manucode vocalisations might suggest "cryptic species" (pp. 356 in both editions). If intraspecific geographical variation in calls be so used, species numbers would increase dramatically – inevitably involving at least two being of nearly identical appearance in each case.

The long known Superb Bird of Paradise *Lophorina superba* (Frith & Beeler 1998) of the 1st edition is now three species, with the clumsy names Vogelkop Superb Lophorhina *Lophorhina superba*, Greater Superb Lophorhina *L. latipennis* and Lesser Superb Lophorhina *L. minor*. The illustration of an adult male Greater Bird of Paradise *Paradisaea apoda* has its flank plumes changed from the typically basally pale yellow fading to white of the 1st edition, Gregory (pp. 376) noting "some PNG birds have vivid apricot-orange plumes grading to yellow at the base". The illustration in the 2nd edition, however, shows

a bird of far less typical appearance for its species – its plumes being shown as basally apricot-orange fading to yellow.

At the back of the 1st edition, 80 Vagrant Species were illustrated, to which Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis*, Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates monorhis*, Mascarene Petrel *Pseudobulweria aterrima*, Nazca Booby *Sula granti*, Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, Aleutian Tern *Onychoprion aleuticus*, and Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* are added in this 2nd edition.

Compared with the Gregory 2nd edition, the 528-page Pratt & Beehler 2nd edition has the same page height but is ~5 mm narrower, is a little thicker without its cover boards, and is 300 g heavier. Producing a 2nd edition of Gregory presented an opportunity to publish a smaller, lighter, 'pocket' guide rather than remaining as it does a large, heavy (1.3 kg) book to carry over remote, rugged, topography and habitats. That said, the present well-produced handsome volume represents a great deal of dedicated thought and meticulous work, the result being a major contribution to the ornithology of an exciting and little-known avifauna.

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