

## **BOOK REVIEW**

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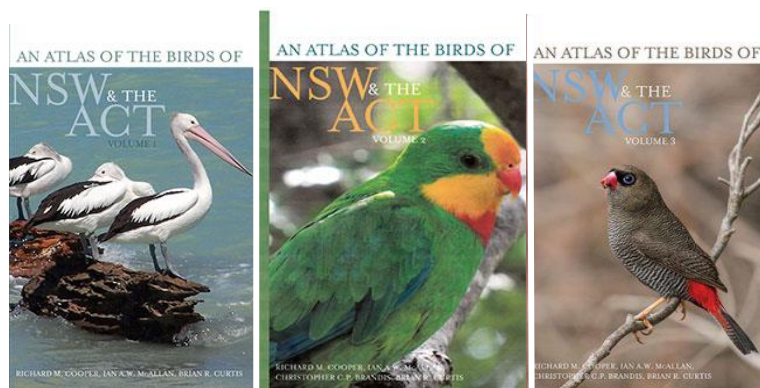
***An Atlas of the Birds of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Vol. 1 Emu to Plains-wanderer.*** By **Richard M. Cooper, Ian A.W. McAllan and Brian R. Curtis.** 2014, New South Wales Bird Atlassers Inc., Wolgoolga, NSW, Australia. ISBN: 9780957704732, Hardback, 720 pp.

***An Atlas of the Birds of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Vol. 2 Comb-crested Jacana to Striated Pardalote.*** By **Richard M. Cooper, Ian A.W. McAllan, Christopher C.P. Brandis and Brian R. Curtis.** 2016, New South Wales Bird Atlassers Inc., Wolgoolga, NSW, Australia. ISBN: 9780957704749, Hardback, 673 pp.,

***An Atlas of the Birds of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Vol. 3 Eastern Spinebill to Common Greenfinch.*** By **Richard M. Cooper, Ian A.W. McAllan, Christopher C.P. Brandis and Brian R. Curtis.** 2020, New South Wales Bird Atlassers Inc., Wolgoolga, NSW, Australia. ISBN: 9780957704756, Hardback, 673 pp.,

Price for all three volumes: \$390 + \$70 postage (\$310 + \$70 postage for members of NSW Bird Atlassers Inc.), volumes can also be purchased individually: for details and ordering contact: [treasurer@nswbirdatlassers.org.au](mailto:treasurer@nswbirdatlassers.org.au)

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Three comprehensive volumes (2066 pages in all) on the birds of New South Wales, and even with the ACT in the title, have to be of great interest and significance to the Canberra birding community. And if one considers that many of us regularly go bird-watching across the border into NSW, and from the coast to the west of this State, and that COG's Area of Interest extends well into NSW, then these three volumes are most relevant and deserve close attention.

One may expect, as the title "An Atlas" suggests, that the volumes will be filled with distribution maps. We are used to such productions from the *The Atlas of Australian Birds* (Blakers *et al.* 1984) and *The New Atlas of Australian Birds* (Barrett *et al.* 2003). *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory - an atlas* (Taylor and COG, 1992) provided not only maps but also interpretative text with basic information on the status, distribution, breeding and seasonal changes for each species.

However, this new atlas for NSW and the ACT [*Atlas* thereafter] presents a major extension to any similar works in Australia. Of course, distribution maps form the backbone. But many other results and details from the survey work and other sources are included, and combined with information from the literature, these volumes give a comprehensive picture of many aspects of the biology of each species. To quote from the Preface, the *Atlas* “will provide an inventory of the birds of the region and a foundation for the management and future directions for specific species studies as well as for environmental planning and conservation efforts within the region.”

The New South Wales Bird Atlassers group was formed in late 1981. Among its main objectives were the determination of the breeding and non-breeding distribution of birds in NSW and the ACT, and the monitoring of these on a continuing basis.

Over 1500 volunteers, including some COG members, conducted many thousands of surveys, providing 56% of all data used. This data was combined with a similar volume of records from other sources (for example, the RAOU Field Atlas, RAOU Historical Atlas and data sets from COG) and those extracted from the literature, including historical records. (In this context ‘historical’ means before 1971.)

The results in the three volumes are based on records from 1971 to 2006.

The area of coverage totals about 1.6 million km<sup>2</sup>, of which 50.5% comprise mainland NSW, and 49.5% the Tasman Sea from the NSW coast to about 160°E, including Lord Howe Island. The basic area unit is a 10-minute block (about 290 km<sup>2</sup>).

What information do we find for a species?

- A box next to the species name gives the number of total records, incidental records, 10-minute blocks, breeding records and breeding blocks;
- Introductory paragraphs describe habitat requirements and give a general description of the distribution in Australia and more specifically in NSW;
- A distribution map for NSW;
- Text on breeding biology;
- Tabulated seasonal reporting rates for all main geographic regions of NSW at 2-monthly intervals;
- A map of reporting rates;
- A map of the breeding distribution;
- A graph with the seasonal distribution of breeding records and seasonal reporting rates;
- Description of seasonal movements (with maps for some species);
- Early records and changes in distribution, supplemented for some species by historical distribution map(s);
- Status;
- Graph of annual reporting rates and an associated box that gives the number of reporting rate records, the trend (*e.g.* increasing, decreasing etc.), the type of graph (*e.g.* simple linear; curvilinear etc.) and the level of significance for the trend.

The number of topics covered varies with species and is most complete for more common breeding birds.

In addition to the species accounts, each volume contains other chapters.

Volume 1 includes an introduction that details the methods of data collection and issues of analysis, coverage and summary statistics, the geography of the area, threatening processes for birds, and appendices giving the literature and manuscript sources for historical data and a biogeographic analysis of the NSW Bird Atlas data set (Julian R.W. Reid).

Volume 2 has a brief introduction and an appendix on the history of ornithology in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (Ian A.W. McAllan).

Volume 3 includes a brief introduction, supplementary species (10 species not covered in Vols. 1 and 2 because there were too few records at the time, but with more recent observations the distribution could be mapped), endemic Lord Howe Island birds (Ian A.W. McAllan and Ian Hutton), vagrant species (Ian A.W. McAllan and David J. James), *i.e.* species with fewer than 20 records and non-breeding species in the area (cut-off date 31 December 2019; 80 species), list of unconfirmed species (52 species), list of introduced species, populations now extinct (20 species), and an index of scientific and common names of birds for all three volumes.

Each volume includes a list of references and a gazetteer. The references are also a valuable resource.

I have only a small quibble. I felt that information from the *Canberra Bird Notes* is inadequately referred to.

Volume 2 received an award as the *2016 Best Zoological Resource* published on any Australian fauna or flora by the Whitley Awards Committee of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW. Volume 3 has been awarded the prestigious Royal Zoological Society's Whitley Award for Highly Commended publication, 2020.

While the data available up to 2006 has been used to compile these volumes, the survey work has continued and is ongoing. The NSW Atlassers are currently working on a 50-year review of their complete dataset to 31 December 2020 to re-assess the trends reported in the 3 Volumes (Richard Cooper, *pers. comm.*). This will be very important in the light of declining annual trends for many species.

For the reviewer the most important aspect of these three volumes is that they enable us to see the birds of COG's Area of Interest in a wider context, including their distribution, and more importantly their biology.

This unique and fundamental work is highly recommended.

## References

- Barrett, G., Silcocks, A., Barry, S., Cunningham, R. and Poulter, R. (2003) *The New Atlas of Australian Birds*. Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, Hawthorn East.
- Blakers, M., Davies, S.J.J.E. and Reilly, P.N. (1984) *The Atlas of Australian Birds*. Melbourne University Press, Carlton.
- Taylor, M. and Canberra Ornithologists Group (1992) *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory – an atlas*. Canberra Ornithologists Group and National Capital Planning Authority, Canberra.

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