

South Polar Skua	
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis (nipalensis)</i>
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
White Wagtail (Black-backed races)	<i>M. alba (lugens)</i>
Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Spice Finch (Nutmeg Mannikin)	

For purely Papua New Guinea list additions, I would predict Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*), Grey-faced Buzzard (*Butastur indicus*), which was reported from Varirata in 1994 but with an inadequate description (PNGBS N/L 283 June 1995), and Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*).

References

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Book Review: *Cuckoos, Nightbirds and Kingfishers of Australia*, edited by Ronald Strahan. 1994. Angus and Robertson. Price \$95.

This is volume 9 in The National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife, and despite the title actually covers 17 families of both non-passerines and passerines. These include pittas, lyrebirds, scrub-birds, larks, swallows, pipits, wagtails cuckoo-shrikes, trillers and bulbuls. One can see why a succinct and accurate title for the book was not possible !

The photographs are of a high standard and include some outstanding shots, the nestling Pheasant Coucals on p.44 being quite superb as are many of the night-birds and cuckoos.

The text is pleasantly generalized and includes many informative digressions into the history of the species. I learned that the use of birds as messengers began during the second Punic War in 218-201 BC, and marking, of the same species, the Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, is mentioned in Pliny. It avoids the dry, purely scientific boredom of Birds of the Western Palearctic, which is almost unreadable, and makes no pretence of being as comprehensive. It is a book to dip into and enjoy rather than being the fount of all wisdom about a species.

That said, I have some difficulty reconciling a \$95 price tag with some major errors in presentation and inconsistencies in the text. The worst example is the Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus* on p125 which is actually a White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*, probably the same bird as that shown in the account of this species since the photographer and dates are the same ! The Tawny Frogmouth flight shot on p.90 is captioned from Baiyer River, Papua New Guinea, if so the first record of the species from this country. The Rufous Scrub-bird on p.196 has a photo beneath it of a Noisy Scrub-bird from Two People Bay in WA and it is at best unclear as to which species it is referring. All such errors are surely avoidable on a careful proof read, and spoil the effect of this major undertaking.

The text is also not without fault. Little Swift *Apus affinis* is mentioned in the general account as a vagrant, but gets no mention under the vagrants section at the end of the book. The accounts of Glossy Swiftlets *Collocalia esculenta* are not really convincing, lacking major field characters, and the photo fails to do the species justice, I would hesitate to identify the species shown here. Fairy Martin is a vagrant to Tasmania, but is marked on the map as found in half the island. Grem-lins have also hit the Latin names, as *Merops orientalis* mentioned on p.164 is emphatically not the European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* which is the intended species. The Brown Pigeon *Macropygia amboinensis* gets a q instead of a p twice, those spell-checkers really have a problem with scientific names !

The ever vexatious Australian taxonomy also rears its head, with lots of new or resurrected genera appearing (*Todiramphus*, *Cecropis*, *Cheramoeca* etc.). Just when you thought Lesser Sooty Owl *Tyto multipunctata* was here to stay, it again gets demoted to *T. tenebricosa* despite a pretty convincing text argument for the differences. The Norfolk Island Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae* gets its own treatment as that form, but is also listed under Southern Boobook as *N. boobook rufulata*, which I suppose hedges the bets.

It is a pity that such inconsistencies were not avoided, too many creep in for such a major work at a major price and detract from the high quality of the project. Books written by committees or teams of authors face a difficult situation, but surely a prestige project like this could get its act together ? Better luck with volume 10, the final one and a grab-bag of everything not already covered in the series, I look forward to the title with interest.

Phil Gregory