

Book Reviews

Book Review Editor's Note: We are continuing to use the current currency codes. Thus Canadian dollars are CAD, U.S. dollars are USD, Euros are EUR, China Yuan Remimbi are CNY, Australian dollars are AUD and so on.

ZOOLOGY

Icelandic Bird Guide

By J. O. Hilmarsson. 2010. Forlagid, Braedraborgarstig 7, Reykjavik, IS – 101, Iceland www.forlagid.is. 672 pages. 4490 Icelandic Kroners, (about 40 CAD)

Iceland is a rocky and rather bare island in the centre of the North Atlantic, but many birds seem to like it a lot, and as this competent and compact bird guide shows us nicely. Iceland's avifauna is located right between the old world, the new world, with the Arctic on top and surrounded by oceans that are affected by the Gulf Stream as well as sea ice. It offers something for everybody and is very informative for the boreal, subarctic, North American and European avifauna. This book helps you to make the sensitive avifauna of Iceland accessible, and which has been a traditional shortcoming for this important region. This great book consists of 24 chapters, such as Introduction, Classification of birds, Glossary, How to use this book, Charts, Distribution maps, Topography of birds, 134 species descriptions (including rare birds), Bird identification, Eggs and young, Birdwatching in Iceland, Bird ringing in Iceland, Statistics on Icelandic birds, Checklist of Icelandic birds, 'Associations, institutions and publications', Sources, List of photographs, Multilingual list of bird names, Index of English names, Index of Latin names, and Notes. I like that three pages with English and Icelandic literature references are provided, which go back to 1936. Bird species names can easily be found in the multilingual list of bird names (Icelandic, Latin, English, N-American, German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Dutch, Italian, French and Spanish!). The nation of Iceland features over 345 bird species by now, but not all are covered in this book unfortunately (most breeders, wintering birds, and vagrants are included though). The covered species in this book are classified into six categories (seabirds, waders, gulls and relatives, waterbirds, land or prey birds, and passerines; each section carries a short introductory summary as well). The bird taxonomy goes back to *Birds of North America* (1987) and Sandberg (1992) for Europe; it is probably slightly outdated and not following AviBase (<http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/avibase.jsp>) or ITIS (www.itis.org). This bird guide basically does not cover subspecies.

Birding in Iceland is rewarding and offers for instance the only location for easily watching Harlequin Ducks

and Barrow's Goldeneyes. The most northern records of breeding Gadwall and Shoveler are found here also. Besides Snowy Owl and Gyrfalcon, fascinating Red Knot and Wheatear migration sightings can be made, and many rare passerine sightings still wait to be documented further, e.g., in the exotic tree plantations and house gardens ('Bicknell's Thrush' and some East European Warblers would make for good birding candidates for instance). Birding in winter and fall also offers many species, e.g., for vagrants. As this book shows us, besides the classic birding hotspots like Lake Myvatn and River Laxa, already the city pond in downtown Reykjavik provides for a great species introduction and bird watching.

This bird guide is very greatly illustrated and offers nice diagrams, maps and over 500 stunning photographs (no drawings are provided; a few rare but elsewhere common species like swifts, martins and warblers could perhaps carry better photos). But I really like that the plumages of gulls and female ducks are presented as special pages. Another real strength of this bird guide is presented with the 25 pages devoted to just eggs and young, and their identification (this will cater for the birding tourists in early summer).

The real strengths of this book are the species chapters and their provided details: occurrence summaries by month, distribution maps, sophisticated diagrams, identification texts, status, size details, and population trends and changes. The data are usually based on 10km and 50km survey grids, Xmas Bird Counts and (British) Wildlife Trust data (raw sources and URLs or contacts are unfortunately not provided).

Additional chapters make for nice, extra and useful information; specifically the section on Icelandic Bird Associations, Institutions and publications I found helpful. The Glossary features 24 terms (one probably could also find them quickly online). The Bird ringing chapter is informative, but a little soft (the Icelandic bird ringing database is not mentioned and no URL is given). Seven pages of 165 photo sources, camera details (and locations!) are given (most photos were taken in the 1990s). Unfortunately, the Checklist of

348 Icelandic birds is based on records from 1998 (over 12 years old); it is available online at www.ni.is/bliki/RCform.pdf.

Another strength of this bird guide are the provided details regarding changes that occurred in the avifauna of Iceland. Such information is otherwise hard to come by, and here bird watchers really can still provide crucial information and updates. Due to man-made global change (global warming) the Dovekie is virtually gone by now from Iceland and as a nesting bird! The Ivory Gull just gets reported as rare visitor (changes for Gyrfalcon, Snowy Owl and Ptarmigan have not been reported, but must be expected to exist). The Icelandic Great Auk extinction story is already part of any good textbook in Conservation and Ornithology; but the Water Rail seems now to follow a similar fate in Iceland (due to Mink predation and wetland drainage). Tufted Ducks invaded Iceland in the 19th century onwards, Short-eared Owls followed in the 20th century, Oystercatchers seem to widen their range. The new occurrence of the Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull on Iceland is already mentioned since the 1920's. Common Gull, Shoveler and Black-tailed Godwit followed closely (no reasons or explanations are provided by the author for any of these events; one would assume agriculture, hunting regulations and fisheries policies are the drivers). The conservation story of the almost extinct White-tailed Eagle in western Iceland makes for a fascinating detail. But the author has not dealt so well with changes in

Northern Gannets and Great Skuas though (both are expanding and/or moving north), or with reporting of fisheries effects on seabirds (perhaps that comes as no bigger surprise to insiders and who know how old-fashioned rural Iceland still is in regards to whaling, hunting of seabirds and dealing with impacts of bad fishing practices). Overall, changes in Iceland's bird world have already been rather dramatic. We are shown that since 1960, three (!) species get added to the Icelandic species list annually, showing major changes in the North Atlantic ecosystems. Ecological issues like Redpoll increases due to Icelandic forest habitat changes are reported in this book too, but urbanization issues and in relation to ravens, house sparrow and starlings are not covered, nor that Iceland is widely overgrazed by sheep and that erosion makes for a serious problem (which affects ground-nesting birds for instance).

Of course, this bird field guide cannot entirely compete with Jonsson's *Bird of Europe*, Sibley's *Guide to Birds* or some data like eBIRD and GBIF (who really can?), but this book makes Icelandic birds much more accessible to us. This field guide by Hilmarsson should be in your hands when dealing with subarctic and Iceland birds species in any capacity.

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Birds of the West Indies

Norman Arlott. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey, USA 08540-5237 2010. 240 pages. 24.95 USD.

Despite the wide variety of digital tools available for bird identification, Bird Field Guides – in book form – have not yet gone out of style. For years Princeton University Press has been publishing field guides for the identification of birds worldwide. The initial standard field guide usually were a hefty item, not suitable for the average back pocket. Overtime the size has diminished and the quality of the illustrations have been enhanced. In evaluating this new book, I have compared it to 3 other field guides:

Book 2: Peterson's Field Guide. J. Bond. Fifth edition. 1993. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Book 3: H. Raffaele, J. Wiley, O. Garrido, A. Keith and J. Raffaele. 2003. *Birds of the West Indies*. Princeton University Press.

Book 4: A photographic guide to Birds of Jamaica. A. Sutton, A. Downer, R. Sutton. 2009. Princeton University Press.

Book 1 (book under review) is smaller but slightly heavier than the other *Birds of the West Indies Guide* (Book 3). The distribution maps are at the back of the

book. I see little advantage of book 1 over book 3 in terms of illustrations. Using the drawing of the Scalynaped Pigeon, I would definitely prefer book 3 in that department. Book 3 has distribution maps with descriptions of the birds. This has much utility when out in the field birding. Book 3 has a list of conservation problems in the front which book 1 does not have. Between book 1 and book 3, the Raffaele et al. book is the preferred choice in terms of usefulness and utility.

When comparing book 1 and book 3 to The Peterson's Guide, they are better than book 2 in terms of illustrations. The only redeeming feature of book 2 is that it has historical value and it is the lightest. However, keep it on your shelf as a collector's item.

I am keeping book 4 – the photographic guide – as the last one for comparison. This book is a field guide to birds in Jamaica – a single country in the West Indies, rather than for all of the islands in this diverse region. Unlike the others, book 4 has colour photographs. The book is exceptionally well illustrated, has range maps on the same page, an excellent overview



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