

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

Birds, Beasts and a Bike Under the South Cross by David Stirling. 2008. 167 pages. 15 cm x 22.5 cm. Numerous black-and-white photographs. Agio Publishing House, 151 Howe Street, Victoria, BC. V8V 4K5. \$14.95 Can. (soft cover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

David Stirling grew up on a farm near Athabaska, Alberta, and as a boy became fascinated by natural things around him - the stars, birds, and plants. His passion for nature has lasted him a lifetime. In British Columbia naturalists, birders, and travelers know David as a nature tour guide, a keen birder, a writer, and for his pioneering work with BC Parks Branch nature interpretive programs. David was responsible

for training some of the leading ornithologists and naturalists in the province and counts among his students Wayne Campbell. I would wager that most naturalists in the province know of David in one way or another. He has had a busy, successful life and his accomplishments are many. He helped in the founding of the Federation of BC Naturalists, for instance. The honours that the province and the country have bestowed upon him are numerous and impressive.

Now readers can vicariously enjoy part of David's life for he has written an exciting and humorous tale of his adventures with his wife at the time, Ruth, exploring New Zealand and Australia by motorbike and camping "rough" and living austerely under the brilliant South Hemisphere stars. From their arrival on the North Island of New Zealand to their departure many months later from Melbourne, David

tells his story in an admirably clear style that makes for easy reading, reminding this reviewer of some of the works of John Steinbeck and Gerald Durrell. His tone is enthusiastic for the natural wonders of the Antipodes. Even when life turns against him as on the Wanganui River in New Zealand when the rubber raft he and Ruth were riding in filled with cold river water and they began trailing a slick of soaked breakfast cereal, he doesn't indulge in self pity but remains philosophical. He has a talent for describing the often rugged individuals he and Ruth met along the way, from the harmless but irritating "ear bashing" brother and sister know-it-all who camped next to them to the pair of "no hoppers" who were ready to beat David up because he had touched a shovel one of them perceived as his personal property.

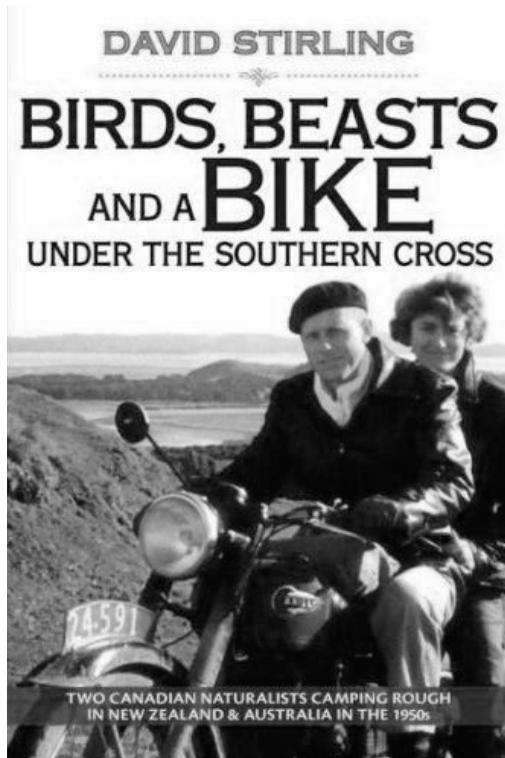
Birds, Beasts and a Bike ...is the perfect book for the armchair traveler. Anyone who has visited New

Zealand and/or Australia will be keen to discover how rudimentary conditions were for the tourists of the 1950s. Besides naturalists and travelers, this book will appeal to motorcyclists and the public in general. Highly recommended.

Shorebirds of Australia by Andrew Geering, L. Agnew, and S. Harding. [2007]. 242 pages. 17 x 25 cms. 210 colour photos. 10 black-and-white photos. Numerous maps, charts, and diagrams. CSIRO Publishing, 150 Oxford St. (P.O. Box 1139), Collingwood, Victoria, Australia, 3066. Available in North America from Buteo Books, 3130 Laurel Road, Shipman, Virginia 22971. www.buteobooks.com. \$65.00 US (soft cover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

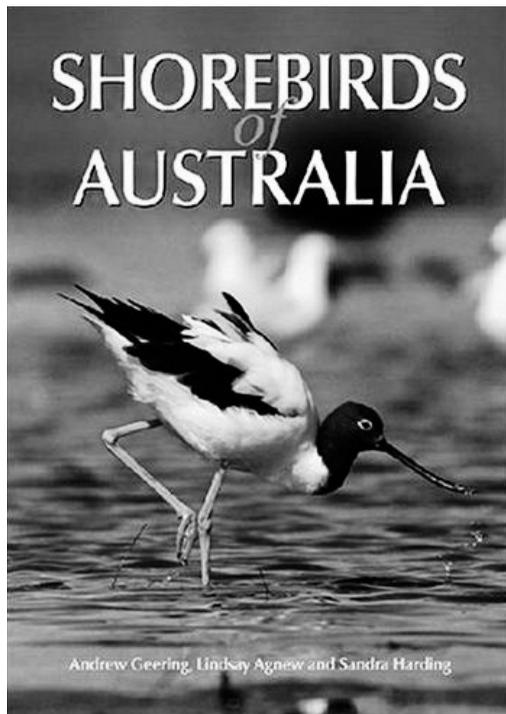
Unlike many land birds, shorebirds of the world have a finite and often threatened number of staging and wintering sites. Their critical foraging habitat, which may include reefs, islets, beaches, and estuaries, is very often the places which western-style development over-runs for pleasure or drains for business expansion. In Australia from 1981 onwards ornithologists and dedicated amateurs have been studying shorebird numbers, feeding behavior, foraging distribution, and migratory behavior. Recent co-operation with southeast Asian ornithologists has resulted in new discoveries about threatened shorebirds such as Curlew Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, and Lesser Sand Plovers, which breed in Asia and winter in southern Asia and Australia.

Preliminary results of surveys were published in 1987 by the Australian Wader Studies Group in *Shorebirds of Australia* edited by Brett Lane, illustrated with painted plates. The new *Shorebirds of Australia* is a completely different book, with up-to-date distribution maps, and valuable introductory chapters on evolutionary history and taxonomy, breeding ecology, migration, feeding ecology, and habitat selection. The chapter on plumages and topography is particularly well done with some of the clearest diagrams of shorebird plumages I have ever seen. Species accounts for the 55 regularly occurring shorebirds feature sections on population sizes for the entire east Asian flyway and for Australia, plumage descriptions, appearance in flight, range, habits, and



similar species. A bibliography of approximately 275 titles and an index conclude the book.

Why should a North American shorebird enthusiast, amateur or professional, go to the trouble of purchasing this text? There are three reasons. First, the introductory chapters about shorebird biology, behavior and habitat use are substantial, well written and clearly explain background information that anyone who studies waders needs to know. Secondly the book is an excellent source of photos of many of the species that stray to the coast of western North America. Finally, the problems of coastal development are truly universal problems, especially with shorebirds, which more often than not migrate from one hemisphere to the other twice a year. The *Shorebirds of Australia* was written with a planetary perspective. In fact, the authors quote B.C. scientist and renowned conservationist David Suzuki in appealing to people to look beyond not only national boundaries but also beyond human priorities of



politics and economics to ensure the survival of the planet. Highly recommended for ornithologists and shorebird enthusiasts.

Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America by Ted Floyd. 2008. Collins, 10 East 53rd St., New York, NY. 10022. 2000 colour photos. Hundreds of distribution maps (by Paul Lehman) 46 “group” essays. ABA Checklist of North American birds. Glossary of terms. DVD of vocalizations of 138 species included. 512 pages. \$26.95 Can. (soft cover). *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Collins has entered the North American field guide market with a photographic guide by Birding magazine’s editor, Ted Floyd. The Smithsonian Guide faces fierce competition indeed. A birder can now choose between David Sibley’s Guide to Birds with its realistic paintings and clean design, the National Geographic’s Field Guide to the Birds of North America which gets better with each edition, Kenn Kaufman’s (Focus Guide to) Birds of North America, and the Stokes’ Field Guide to Birds – Western Region, to mention only the major choices. Since the Smithsonian Guide uses photographs and not comparative plates, for me this automatically places it in the second tier, useful as a reference book but hardly a first choice as a field guide. Photographs are just too variable in tones and shades of colour, and postures to create the comparative uniformity necessary for plates of similar species. Kenn Kaufman partially overcame the tone and shade problems in his photographic Birds of North America by digitally manipulating each bird’s image and placing the bird without the rest of the photograph onto a neutrally coloured page with other members of its genus or group. In the Smithsonian guide, however, the vagaries of photographic printing have not been addressed. Even within a species shade and colour problems are evident. Thus, there are images of Alder Flycatchers that are brown or gray, you take your pick. An identical problem occurs in the Stokes guide. Overall if you insist on a photographic guide as first choice, buy Kaufman’s field guide.

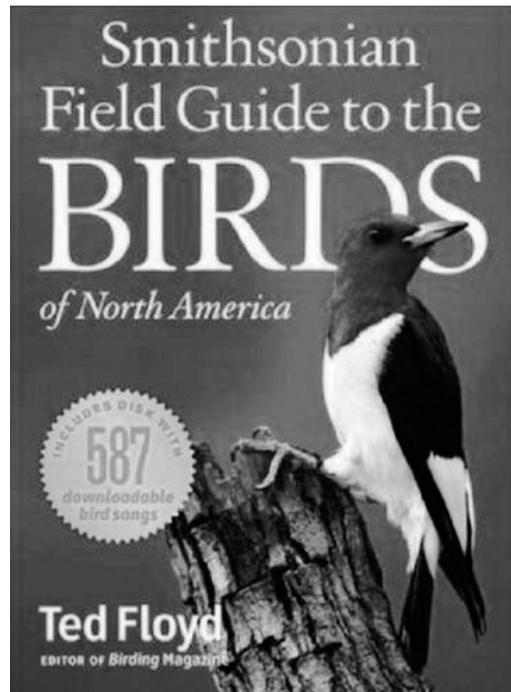
The Smithsonian guide has another photographic problem. For people who prefer a light neutral background against which the birds stand in contrast,

a few of the photos in the Smithsonian guide are printed with backgrounds that are deep blue or even purple and when viewed in artificial light the picture is hard on the eyes. Examples include Lewis's Woodpecker (p. 276) and Green-tailed Towhee (p.418).

On a more positive note, the Smithsonian guide covers about 750 species. Each is given its ABA code, a rating of 1 (occurs widely and regularly seen in N. America) to 6 (extinct or otherwise impossible to see in the wild), enabling the birder to know how difficult a species is to see in the ABA area. One to three photos are given for each species with the occasional species warranting up to 5 photos (the jaegers, Bushtit, Black-billed Magpie, Common Raven, and Barn Swallow). This subspecific coverage strikes me as uneven. Both "eastern" and "western" Warbling Vireos are shown but not the races of the Peregrine Falcon! The Gyrfalcon has three photos only, none showing the darkest morph, and the photo of the white morph looks a lot like a grey morph.

Other omissions were made, likely for lack of space. For example, some of the 4 year gulls are shown in only two photos per species. On the other hand, photo quality is as high as you will see among photographic field guides. To pick nits: there's no photo of an immature Grasshopper Sparrow; the photo of the "slate-coloured" Fox Sparrow is poor and that of a perched Swallow-tailed Kite, one of the most photogenic birds in the world, looks like it was taken with a first generation cell phone camera. However, most photos are great and worth the price of the book alone.

Descriptions of appearance are in captions in small print. Major songs and calls are described. For each species a short note on behaviour, habitat and/or status is provided next to a small distribution map. Length, wingspan, and weight are in imperial measures. Finally, three lines note the number and "strategy" of moults per year, age and gender differences in plumage and subspecific differences. These lines are too brief to be of much use. In addition a DVD containing 587 MP3 files for the vocalizations of 138 "major" species is in a pocket at the back of the book. The cover states there are forty six "group essays". These I guessed were the introductions (at 1 page each) to each major taxonomic group. I counted



45, not 46, but found the introductions very good. A nice feature not well advertised is the inclusion of 16 short notes within introductions. These notes explain points of great value to the beginner such as "can we tell an escapee from captivity from a natural vagrant" or what is mobbing about."

Although I have highlighted some of the weaknesses of the Smithsonian guide, I must say that given the modest purchase price, the birder is getting a lot of book for their money. Within the photographic field guide category Smithsonian ties with Kaufman's Focus guide for top place. Not essential, but very worth adding to any birder's library.

The Last Wild Wolves: Ghosts of the Great Bear Rainforest by Ian McAllister with contributions by Chris Darimont. Introduction by Paul C. Paquet. [2007]. 192 pages. 27 x 29 cms. 96 colour photographs. Greystone Books, Douglas and McIntyre Publishing Group, 2323 Quebe St., Suite 201, Vancouver, B.C.

V5T 3A5. \$45.00 Can. (hardcover). 22 minute DVD by Twyla Roscovich included. *Reviewed by Chris Siddle.*

Any naturalist interested in wolves must have a copy of *The Last Wild Wolves*. Author, researcher, and photographer Ian McAllister has created an informative and beautiful account of four packs of wolves that have grown accustomed enough to him to allow him to photograph them intimately living in the Great Bear Rainforest, “the largest intact temperate rainforest “ growing on the rugged and isolated north coast of British Columbia.

The Last Wild Wolves is both a beautiful coffee table book of photographs which tell a visual story of wolves and their whelps living against an intricate and sometimes brooding backdrop of ancient forests and coastal estuaries, and an essay about how special these wolves are. Impressive portraits abound and are suitably presented in big format which reinforces the power of the wolves and the mystery of their biological world. However included among the vistas are also personal portraits, for example, the four month old whelp with clown-sized paws (p. 36) or the two Sentries, siblings staring implacably at the photographer (p. 135). In both photographs and prose, connections are stressed: a wolf carries a salmon deeper into the forest where the discarded parts will fertilize the forest; a pack makes its den among the mossy ruins of an old First Nations village; a First Nations youth dances his part in the Wolf Dance, and so McAllister reveals to his audience that the wolves are important to the ecology of the rain forest and not just a “factor” to be manipulated in a “managed” forest.

The wolves of the Great Bear Rainforest are slowly revealing their secrets to researchers. Packs inhabiting the outer islands have a diet comprised of up to 75% marine foods, including barnacles and most notably salmon. The fishing wolves play a crucial role in the local ecology, carrying salmon from the streams into the forests where the parts of the fish not eaten become fertilizer enriching the soil and in turn increasing productivity of everything that depends in one way or another upon biodiverse forests from salamanders to Winter Wrens, from centipedes to Bald Eagles. Coastal wolves select salmon over deer

which doesn’t happen anywhere else in the world. Pup survival in the rainforest is among the highest in the wolf’s wide range. Genetically, the rain coast wolves are far more diverse than their continental relatives, probably because the coastal wolves are the least human-disturbed wolves in the world.

Sadly even in the rainforest wolves are not safe from their only enemy, human-kind. Aside from direct persecution which occurs (ironically because these fish-eating wolves are falsely perceived to be over-consumers of local deer populations), wolves also suffer as clear cut logging tears apart the ecology of the coastal rainforest. Other creatures suffer too. Snow accumulates in clear cuts and deer suffer up to 60% mortality, unable to reach food beneath the snow. When deer shelter in timbered areas, the new uniform composition of planted forests contains little undergrowth that the ungulates can browse upon and thus they starve. Low deer numbers are blamed upon the most convenient suspect, the wolf, and so the vicious cycles run.

Buying and reading *The Last Wild Wolves* are two things the reader can do to help the rainforest. The points made by McAllister can be reviewed in Twyla’s Roscovich’s compelling 22 minute movie, included with the book as a DVD. [Highly recommended.](#)

