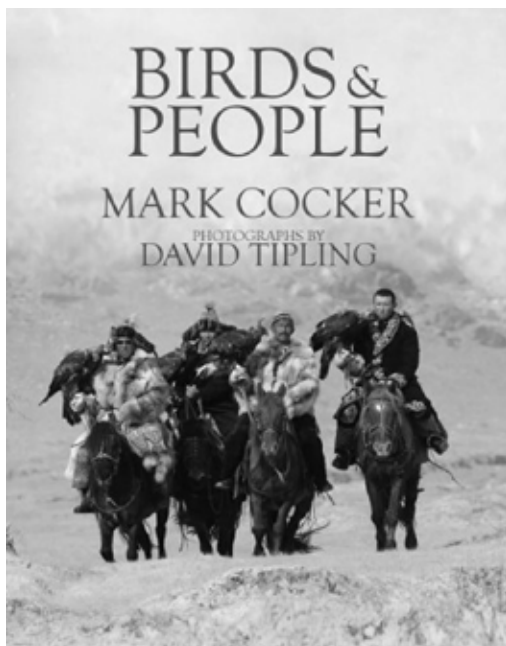


BOOK REVIEWS

Compiled and Reviewed by Chris Siddle

Birds & People by Mark Cocker. 2013. Jonathan Cape, Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA. 22.5 x 28.5 cm. 592 pages. Hundreds of colour photographs by David Tipling. Three appendices, 13 pages of select bibliography, and 16 pages of textual notes. Index. Hardcover. \$65.00 Can.

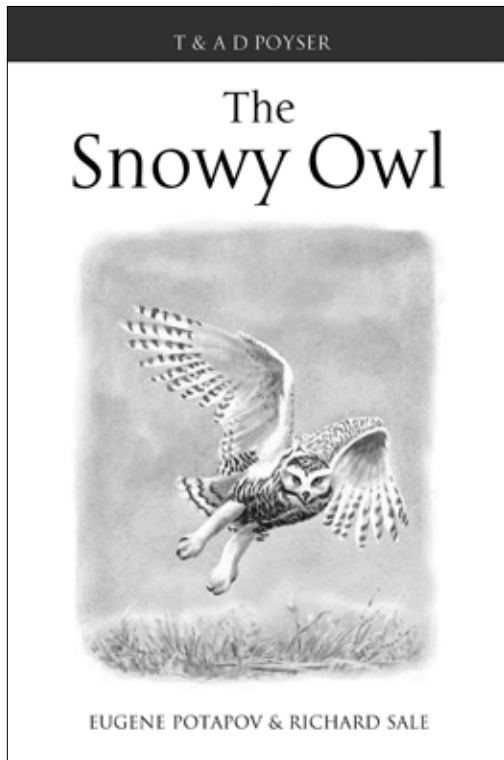


Birds & People is an extravaganza of people's responses to birds. It includes almost every family of birds in the world except 59 bird groups, which contain only a small number of species deemed of little cultural interest and not addressed, but are listed in an appendix. Almost every group from pheasants to nightjars to siskins has evoked stories, folklore, amazing accounts, scientific facts from people who responded to Mark Cocker's request for information about how their lives "are entwined with, and ...very often shaped by their encounters with birds."

You probably have no book like *Birds & People* on your bookshelves. Mark Cocker and David Tipling, with specialized assistance from Jonathan Elphick and John Fanshawe, synthesized a vast amount of literature as well as responses from over 650 correspondents from around the world. Arranged by family, it's a hefty book with large pages and small font, but there's nothing dusty about its content. It contains history that you may already be familiar with like the infamous Emu War, Australia's mad assault on the flightless, hapless Emu where the army planned to drive an estimated 20,000 Emus along a front toward troopers armed with rifles and two machine guns in 1932. It's a study of popular culture containing details that may be new to you such as how "woody woodpecker," the cartoon character that enjoyed fame from 1940–1972, had his trade-mark call based upon that of the Acorn Woodpecker.

In the entry about New World quail there is information from Arthur Cleveland Bent's life histories as well as a Nebraskan hunter's confession that he rarely bags a Northern Bobwhite because when a covey unexpectedly explodes into flight at his feet he can't decide quickly enough which bird to shoot. Anthropologists, indigenous hunter/gatherers, recreational hunters, tribesmen, falconers, sailors, explorers, backyard feeders for birds, musical composers, caged bird enthusiasts, birders, photographers, Hawaiian aristocracy, Roman philosophers, novelists, historians, anyone who has a relationship with birds may appear in this entertaining encyclopedia that was made for browsing. With bright, crisp photographs on every page, the book is a joy to look through. This is a work of ornithological literature that may never be equaled. The book is handsomely produced and will provide the reader with a lifetime of reading pleasure. Highly recommended.

The Snowy Owl by Eugene Potapov and Richard Sale. 2012. T and AD Poyser, 50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP. 52 colour and 34 black-and-white photographs. Many graphs, charts, and other figures. Two appendices. 31 pages of references. Index. 16 x 24 cm. Hardcover. Approximately \$85.00 Can.



Eugene Potapov and Richard Sale are raptor biologists specializing in high-latitude birds of prey. Potapov has done research on Rough-legged Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Gyrfalcon, and Steller's Sea Eagle among other species. The authors wrote *The Gyrfalcon* (Poyser 2005), which won The Wildlife Society's best science book 2006 award, a monograph that won praise worldwide. Their latest collaboration, *The Snowy Owl*, promises to be even more successful as Potapov, now a professor of biology in the USA, becomes more familiar with the English language.

The monograph covers a brief history of people who had previously studied Snowy Owls, species

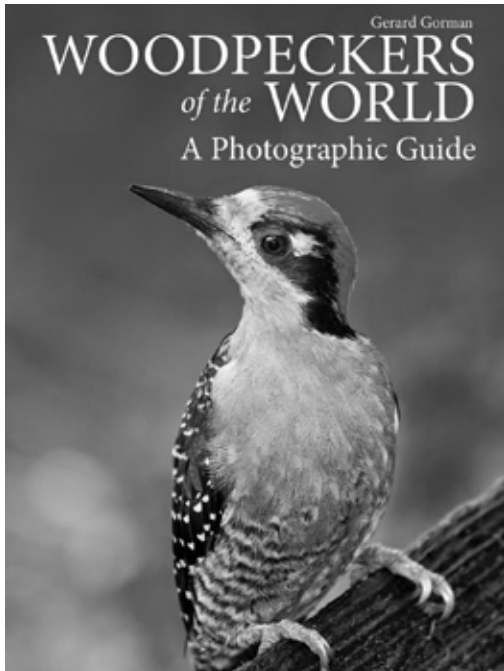
description, ageing and sexing, colour, morphology, measurements, egg size, skeleton, eyesight, breeding range, and paleontology. The book also examines the systematics, evolution, winter and summer habitats, territoriality, and reproduction from sexual displays to juvenile dispersal, the bioenergetics of adults and chicks, body temperature, heart rate, energy budgets, summer and winter diets, pellets, food-caching, hunting strategy, cannibalism, kleptoparasitism, numbers and population density, and winter range. As well, there is discussion of enemies, viruses, parasites and microbes, and commensal species. There is also a section on Snowy Owls' relationships with people. There are two special essays on wintering Snowy Owls at Logan Airport, Boston by Norman Smith et al., describing an on-going study begun in 1981, and a brief exploration by Anne Eastham of a possible Palaeolithic cave people cult of the Snowy Owl in southwest France. Even the recent blip of interest in Snowy Owls caused by the appearance of Hedwig, the Snowy Owl in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, is explored to see whether it caused an increase in the smuggling of live Snowy Owls from northern lands (it probably didn't). Global warming is briefly examined with the authors predicting that within the next 100 years Snowy Owls may lose 70% of their breeding range.

The only thing that I can think of that warrants inclusion in a future edition of this wonderful book would be a study of the disturbances to Snowy Owls caused by bird photographers seeking close-up images. In some sites like Boundary Bay near Vancouver, BC, where Snowy Owls traditionally gather to winter the approach by photographers can be almost constant, causing the birds to flush from their perches several times a day. For a creature that conserves energy by sitting still for long periods, such disturbance has the potential to seriously deplete energy resources.

Until such a study takes place, I think it's safe to say that *The Snowy Owl* is currently the last word on the species. Highly recommended for all naturalists.

Editor's Note: See *Wildlife Afield* 6:173-254 (2009) for a comprehensive update on the Snowy Owl in British Columbia.

Woodpeckers of the World: A Photographic Guide by Gerard Gorman. 2014. Firefly Books, 50 Staples Ave., Unit 1, Richmond Hill, Ont. L4B 0A7. 17.5 x 24.5 cm. Hundreds of colour photographs and maps. 528 pages including 9 pages of references. Index. Hardcover. \$49.95 Can.



Our post-modern world of relatively cheap international air travel and affordable telephoto lenses has made photographic guides to various groups of birds possible. However, travel and photography don't guarantee a quality book. Intelligent book design, subject expertise, thorough research, and concise writing are required, qualities that are immediately obvious in the excellent *Woodpeckers of the World: A Photographic Guide*, making it a model to which a new generation of bird photo-guide compilers can aspire.

Gerard Gorman is an eastern European ornithologist, guide, and author of the recent excellent *Woodpeckers of Europe* (Bruce Coleman 2004) and *The Black Woodpecker* (Lynx Editions 2011). He introduces the text with a compact 20 pages on

woodpecker taxonomy, distribution, anatomy, habitat, behaviour, breeding, plumage, foraging, vocalizations, and drumming. After examining the importance of woodpeckers to the world, he begins the main body of his work with 475 pages covering 239 concise species accounts, each illustrated with 2–3 photographs and a distribution map. These break down to two wrynecks, 31 piculets (of 3 genera) and 206 woodpeckers (of 25 genera). In the world of taxonomists the exact number of woodpeckers, like so many other bird families, depends upon with whom you talk. *The World of Birds* (2014) is very conservative at 210 species, whereas *Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World* (2014), which belongs to *The Handbook of Birds of the World* family, lists 254. With his book listing 239 species, Gorman writes: “Some observers view recent taxonomic splits as exaggerated, others as too conservative, and thus the total of species included will please some and displease others.”

Each species account covers plumages, major vocalizations and drumming, status, habitat, range, taxonomy and variation, similar species, and food and foraging. The species range from the smallest, the Bar-breasted Piculet of Amazonia (at 7.5-8 cm in length) to the largest, the Great Slaty Woodpecker of south-east Asia (at 45-51 cms). The Imperial Woodpecker of Mexico and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker of the southeastern United States and Cuba are included but without photographs and are described as probably extinct.

The book concludes with a nine-page bibliography of important references that appeared after the publication of *The Handbook of the Birds of the World* Volume 7, updating that tome's exhaustive reference list.

Woodpeckers of the World: A Photographic Guide is more than the sum of its parts. It is an attractively and intelligently designed, superbly organized and beautifully printed book. The photographs are crisp, the colours are brilliant and true, the editing is top notch, and the prose is succinct. The only extravagance is an attractive one: each genus is introduced by a full page photograph of a representative species. The author urges anyone with new information about woodpeckers to contact him at the publishers, so that future editions of this outstanding work can be updated. Highly recommended