

Book reviews

Publishers and Authors are invited to submit a copy of their books for a review in the journal. Books are to be sent to the Deputy Editor-in-chief of Avocetta (Dr. Michelangelo Morganti - CNR-IRSA Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Istituto di ricerca sulle acque - Via del Mulino 19, 20861 Brugherio - MB)

A non-strictly-ornithological yet important book for all birders that want to engage in nature conservation

It is rare to review in Avocetta a book that does not strictly deal with ornithology. Nevertheless, this book deserves consideration for its focus on nature conservation, which is among the topics of our journal, in particular of our recently-launched Forum on conservation, as well as of the Editorial that opens this issue. In addition, bird conservation plays a central role in this book, because it was among the fields that traced the road for other multilateral environmental agreements. For instance, the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) are extensively cited in the book, as well as many other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs – the technical name given to international treaties throughout the book) that are central for bird conservation, as the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) and the Ramsar Convention.

In its ten chapters and two appendices, this book presents a broad view on international treaties that sustain global effort in nature conservation, from setting them in the international contest to explaining how they work and how they developed historically, to how they can be foreseen to evolve in the future. Chapters 7 and 8 may appear less interesting for a non-UK reader, as they focus on the UK implementation of MEAs and on how the UK has

affected – and still affects – the international efforts for nature conservation. However, they still deserve attention as, for instance, they extensively deal with the impacts that the European Union (EU) legislation have had on UK laws – which may be of interest at least for readers from other EU countries – and on the consequences of Brexit. Interestingly, the book ends by discussing with a critical and fair approach if and how MEAs have made a difference in nature conservation on a global scale. Appendix 1 lists the main types of processes for international cooperation and is extremely useful for those that approach the world of MEAs for the first time.

The authors bring a huge wealth of their expertise in this short and easy-to-read book, which opens to anyone involved in conservation policy the often confusing realm of conventions, memoranda of understanding, agreements, protocols, actions plans and so on, with the goal of turning these apparently abstract formulas into instruments for making governments' actions more nature-conscious.

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Reference

Stroud D.A., Cromie R., Finlayson M., Lewis M., Mundkur T., Pritchard D., Spray C., Tasker M., Tierney N., Tierney R. & Wilson J.D., 2021. International treaties in nature conservation: a UK perspective. Biodiversity Press. 94 p. 25.26 €

Identifying the ocean wanderers: a guide to the seabirds of the world


Seabirds have always fascinated people imagination. These ocean wanderers spend most of their lives on or below the sea surface, prospering in challenging environmental conditions. Most of them are elusive creatures, difficult to study and observe, further fostering people fascination. I am very familiar with the mixture of excitement and frustration that occurs when, standing on the deck of a pitching boat surrounded by sea spray, a seabird appears on the sea surface, shooting through waves and disappearing in seconds. To defeat the frustration of the failed identification, good knowledge of key structural features, phenology and species present in the area is mandatory. "Seabirds: The new identification guide", tackle these challenges, covering in detail each point needed to successfully identify seabirds, resulting in a must have manual for every seabird lover.

The book provides a detailed overview of 434 species of seabirds, starting with marine ducks and ending with pelicans (including grebes and phalaropes), with extensive information about biological traits, identification features and challenges, species distribution and possible confusion species. The book contains accurate illustration of each species (more than 3800 individual drawings), and particular care has been given to illustrating plumage differences between sexes and age classes, providing extremely useful and sometimes novel information. For example, the plates on frigatebird plumage classes describe in detail the plumage cycle of each species, a feature often disregarded in most seabird guides and extremely important for the identification of these iconic but challenging group. Importance has been given to the jizz of the species, a key feature for identifying seabirds at sea, and the authors provide a "logical workflow" to use when observing an unknown seabird. The information on each species is based on recent published scientific literature, and an extreme care in details has been adopted throughout the book. The internal part of the cover shows the

inaccessible islands where the seabird colony cited in the text are, and make the reader dream about the remote places where seabirds breed. The plates in the book are of very good quality, but the attention to detail, accuracy and beauty of Hans Larsson drawings, who have illustrated the first part of the book (gulls, terns, skimmers, skuas, and seaducks) are astonishing. While Peter Harrison distinctive drawing style, with more emphasis on feathering, can be sometimes slightly misleading, there is plenty of information in the text and captions to discriminate between species. His poetic introduction to the book takes you through his work of a lifetime, from the beginning of seabirding, to his first book (the previous version of the guide, dated 1983), to his dream of a comprehensive and update seabird guide. While reading "Seabirds: The new identification guide" you can perceive the authors love for this special group of birds, ultimately resulting in a masterpiece that it is not only an identification guide, but a love declaration to seabirds.

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Harrison P., Perrow M. & Larsson H., 2021. Seabirds. The New Identification Guide. Lynx Edicions. 600 p.


A new masterpiece on the migration ecology of European birds of prey

As commented by Richard Porter in his Foreword to this book, the study of raptor migration has tremendously advanced in the last decades. Part of the huge bulk of knowledge collected on this topic has been published as scientific papers - in some cases also in our journal – but a considerable part of this is dispersed over hundreds of ‘grey’ publications as bulletins, websites, or even simply stored in the pc of some researcher. The MEDRAPTORS team, an Italian association founded by Nicolantonio Agostini, Ugo Mellone, and Michele Panuccio has a decadal history of field research on raptor migrations in Europe. In these years, they have been able to build up connections with all of the major researchers of this field and they profited from these to propose and coordinate a magistral collective work, with unprecedented results. Altogether to the excellent introduction led by the three Editors, which can well be considered as a self-standing paper, the book sees the contributions of 65 researchers from all over Europe. The book is structured in chapters, one for each of the 32 species of migrant raptors that populate Europe. The length of the chapters is variable, from the 17 pages concerning the movements of the well-studied Egyptian Vultures to the four of the much less known Merlin. Each species is accompanied by an excellent map designed by Martina Scacco showing the main flyways and, when data are available, of the routes followed by tracked individuals. For the species with the most data available, phenological phases are treated separately and a section is dedicated to stressing the current knowledge gap and suggesting future research directions. In this sense, the book aims to stimulate the growth of this research field in the years to come. The Editors insisted with the authors of the chapters (in some cases themselves) to make an effort to collate all the grey bibliography, the ringing records, and the individual tracking data either published or not. The result is an unprecedented collection of

data, citing more than 1,300 bibliographic records and making available for the first time a bulk of unpublished information about migration phenology, routes, timing, and comparing migratory flows across different bottlenecks in the case of soaring species. Overall, this book is a must-have for all those that have an interest in migration ecology, well beyond raptor specialists. On one hand, looking at its contents, this work is a superb example of how collaborative science can significantly improve our knowledge of ecological phenomena and should be of inspiration for all of us. On the other hand, looking at the publication history, I must stress that it would be a pleasure to see these kinds of collaborative works published in open access formats, at least in respect of the huge amount of work that these experts did for free. The price of the volume is overall excessive and the quality of the printing, especially of the 16 colour plates that close the book, does not justify it. I warmly wish that the contents of this wonderful book will be made somehow more easily accessible to the international ornithological community.

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Reference

Panuccio M., Mellone U. & Agostini N., 2021. Migration Strategies of Birds of Prey in Western Palearctic. CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida, USA. 310 pp. 55€ kindle format; 82€ paperback; 215€ hardback.