

the decline of many seabird species. More worryingly, the authors speculate on the possible effects on seabirds of global warming. They highlight the submergence of breeding colonies under raised sea levels, and also the reduction in phytoplankton populations as a consequence of warmer sea temperatures. This section of the book ends on an optimistic note, however, with a brief discussion of how some of the above issues are being addressed, together with pointers as to how the individual birdwatcher may help.

The body of the book is contained in the 45 plates that depict all of the species, together with the accompanying text for each species. The plates are arranged in systematic order, on the right-hand page, with brief descriptions of the species on the page opposite. This is a well-tryed and successful format, especially for a book designed to be used in the field. The majority of the birds are shown in flight, with a few images of birds on water. Confusion species are often shown together on the same plate, which helps in field identification.

On the whole, the plates are reasonable. Two points of criticism apply, however. Firstly, the style of the artist is too 'loose' for my liking. I prefer illustrations in identification guides to be more detailed. I realize this is a personal view and others may have a different opinion. The second criticism is much more important. The majority of the plates illustrate birds against a white background. For species with significant amounts of white in the plumage, this makes seeing the bird very difficult. For example, snowy albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), Figures 1a, 1d (Plate 1); southern royal albatross (*D. epomophora*), Figures 2a, 2c (Plate 1); and the fulmars (*Fulmarus* sp.), (Plate 12). The book would, in my opinion, be enhanced enormously if the artist had painted the birds against a non-white background. I also feel that the illustration of the waved albatross (*Phoebastria irrorata*), Figure 1a (Plate 5), looks a little light and is not an accurate representation of the species.

The detailed text for each species follows on from the plates, and sections cover taxonomy, distribution, behaviour, 'jizz,' size, plumage variations, moult and wear, and identification points. Happily, there is an accurate, up-to-date, and well-drawn distribution map for each species, which is a very helpful tool for assessing the likelihood of the bird you've just seen could actually be the one you think it is!

In the case of the Pacific storm petrels, we are informed that neither author has much field experience in this part of the world — an honest approach — and that the texts for species in this part of the world were difficult to prepare. They suggest that more care and attention is needed in identifying white-rumped storm petrels photographed in places such as the Galapagos. I, for one, will now be re-examining my own photographs to confirm identification, based on the information in this book.

Overall, this book is a very good attempt to represent the known extant seabirds in these groups, and is up to date. For example, the recent rediscovery of the New

Zealand storm petrel (*Pealeornis maoriana*), which had been presumed extinct, is covered. Interestingly, this species was identified from digital photographs taken at sea on a pelagic trip — the authors quite rightly pointing out the importance of obtaining photographs of seabirds as a means of confirming identification.

For many of the seabirds described in this guide, the birdwatcher is often given only the briefest of glimpses, as the bird zooms past a boat, in a sea that is anything other than flat calm. The advent of digital photography has helped enormously — something the authors emphasise. However they rightly make the point that a photograph can only be one part of the observation of a seabird and that photography does not replace field craft — the observation by eye of the bird and the recording of contemporaneous field notes — a skill that has, it seems, declined over the years.

The authors are at pains to point out that as time goes on and more research is undertaken, the position in terms of number of species and their relationships may well change. However, for a representation of the current position, this is an admirable effort. It is a compact volume, and although not really pocket-sized, could easily accompany the birdwatcher on pelagic trips or cruises.

Harrison's book generated a hunger amongst bird-watchers to get to know more about seabirds, and the book reviewed here represents a major step forward in knowledge about the pelagic seabirds of the world. With the reservations outlined above in mind, I have no hesitation in recommending this volume to all birdwatchers and seabird workers. (Kevin Elsby, Chapel House, Bridge Road, Colby, Norwich NR11 7EA.)

Reference

Harrison, P. 1983. *Seabirds: an identification guide*. London: Croom Helm.

THE COLDEST CRUCIBLE: ARCTIC EXPLORATION AND AMERICAN CULTURE. Michael F. Robinson. 2006. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. xii + 206 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-226-72184-2. US\$39.00.
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Guided by previous scholarship that engaged the rich social and institutional contexts of exploration, Michael Robinson turns the frame of focus away from the north toward its domestic audience, in a timely and resonant attempt to consider the cultural importance of the Arctic itself. From the outset, Robinson pays particular attention to what may be called the 'culture' of exploration, to the competing demands placed upon explorers by a range of public audiences, the struggles to build support for expeditions before departure and to defend claims upon their return, and the ongoing efforts of explorers to cast themselves as individuals worthy of the nation's full attention. The Arctic became a stage for the performance of strident patriotism as well as becoming a platform for

personal gain, and Robinson ably navigates this obvious contradiction.

The structure of the book is simple: there are a series of case-study chapters, chronologically arranged, featuring the travels and tribulations of some 'emblematic' Arctic explorers (so chimes the publisher's material), which nevertheless draw numerous connections between these explorers and their public over this crucial period in American history. Although there is some repetition of themes and arguments, perhaps at the cost of more primary materials or further analysis and explanation, through the course of this book Robinson's central thesis does ring clear: to examine Arctic exploration as an activity that unfolded not only in the Arctic but also at home. Through a succession of nineteenth-century scandals, failures, successes, and controversies, Robinson reveals the diminished role of science in Arctic campaigns, and the increased importance of press personality, patronage, and good publicity. He well describes the 'mercurial' condition of American culture in the 1850s, for example, a time of new entertainments, new magazines and publishing houses, and expanding readerships. This was a period that witnessed the emergence of a vibrant print culture and a mass reading public. Explorers were much read and talked about and their adventures were re-enacted in lecture halls, theatres, and in all manner of visual entertainments.

It is important to remember that far from being universally praised and lauded, explorers were accompanied at every step with equal measures of scepticism and criticism; although many explorers were fêted by their admirers, raised up for emulation, they were also condemned as fool-hardy, sometimes even vilified because of falling short of the goals that they set for themselves. This questioning of the motives of exploration was not limited to the Cook–Peary controversy of 1909, but can be seen in a long century of cynicism, as numerous expeditions were marred by scandal and very real failure. It was in this lively context of public scrutiny that explorers had to justify, to explain, and, often literally, to 'sell' their achievements, burdened by expectation, reaping rewards whilst at the same time often victims of their own self-advertisement. Explorers were concerned as much with profitable publishing contracts, society awards, and securing key lecture engagements as they were with their ability to provide scientific observations and impressive cartographic discoveries. When the redoubtable 'go it alone' Robert Peary described exploration as a pursuit so 'free from discussions, from entanglements, from social complications,' he was, of course, appealing to an image of exploration that perhaps never existed. Just as his rhetoric swam with idealism and falsehood, his image as an explorer continues both to challenge and inspire those who read about his exploits. Exploration existed within a tangle of pressures, obligations, and the demands of an attentive public. Performing before a range of audiences, polar explorers faced tough challenges well before they left for the ice.

As reader, one travels far during the course of Robinson's book. One witnesses the frenzy of public mourning meeting the funeral cortège of Elisha Kent Kane as it journeys from Cuba to Philadelphia; joins the wealthy roving reporter Walter Wellman, precariously aloft in his 185-foot motorized airship *America*; and sees Isaac Hayes idling at anchor aboard *United States*, later returning to a country consumed in Civil War. In other sections of Robinson's narrative one can accompany Charles Francis Hall as he tours lecture theatres with a Nugumiut family, raising interest in his explorations yet pushing showmanship to the limits of exploitation. One can read lurid press accounts of Adolphus Greely and the demise of his party at Cape Sabine, and too the tragedy of the *Jeannette*. One sits in the audience to watch Frederick Cook on stage with his entourage of Greenlandic dogs, Inuit children, and two barrels of bones disinterred from an ancient grave site, and later can chuckle as he is parodied mercilessly by cartoonists while his claimed attainment of the North Pole erupts into controversy. This is indeed an enjoyable and jaunty trek through the highs and lows of a colourful century of exploration.

There are, of course, many omissions — a book of this length could not hope to be definitive — but also there are some errors that do injustice to an otherwise elegant contribution to this field of academic enquiry. A major missing feature of this examination of the machinery of celebrity is that of visual culture. Although there are many late-century cartoons and some plates from Kane's published works, one feels that illustrations ought to have been better, for a major premise here is that exploration was as much read about during this century as it was viewed, watched, and enjoyed in crowded metropolitan theatres and provincial halls. There is little or no discussion of popular ballads, magic lantern shows, and theatrical entertainments, neither much on the buoyant illustrated press or juvenile literature, nor any consistent coverage of the many dioramas, panoramas, and other 'Arctic Spectacles' that toured the country, generating and sustaining interest in explorers and their deeds. The author's brief treatment of the varied ideological contexts of British exploration is also understandable, although in the process he tends toward undue simplification. Robinson's description of Admiralty Arctic voyages as 'a safer form of conquest, offering many of the advantages of war without the messy commitments of empire,' employs a tidy turn of phrase at the expense of more satisfying analysis. Likewise, his dichotomic contrasts of Hayes and Hall, and the perceptions that emanated from their differences in approach to travel and to indigenous peoples, are overstressed, yet he does raise interesting avenues for future enquiry into the connections between narrative, national imaginations, and the fluid discourses of racial difference and asserted masculinities. There are occasionally simple slip-ups too, such as his suggestion that Cook reached the Pole on 22 April 1908 (the explorer proclaimed he had attained his prize on 21 April), but this is partly excusable for so much

uncertainty still surrounds the passage of events despite almost 100 years of reportage, debate, and retrospective scrutiny.

These reservations withstanding, there is so much here that is really wonderful stuff. Following Beau Riffenburgh's lead in *The myth of the explorer*, Robinson's analysis of the role of the press in sustaining a popular culture of exploration remains compelling, and is one of the major strengths of this engaging book. *The coldest crucible* takes a big step toward helping to explain why the North Pole, a region so geographically removed from Americans, became such an iconic destination for discovery. Although brief, I particularly enjoyed Robinson's discussion of the seductive pull of these regions, the 'Arctic Fever,' to re-use a borrowed phrase that is more than merely a playful literary metaphor. In fact, the phrase was part of a vocabulary of polar endeavour that many explorers were quick to urge upon their audiences: to justify their actions as pure, romantic impulses and to try to explain away the irrational compulsion that drove them to the north, while at the same time glossing over the very real and rational motives for voyaging, namely the promise of fame and financial reward. This idea still binds many travellers and adventurers — particularly those pseudo-explorers of the present — into 'deliberate risk-taking in pursuit of a goal of no apparent practical value.' Just as astronauts hurtle into space, or happy tourists chug north in icebreakers, all are tied by the representations they make to friends, family, perhaps patrons; all bound to the 'needs of a watchful public.'

Overall, this is a useful study that should have broad appeal: to historians, historians of science, cultural and historical geographers, and, not least, to a large public audience. Robinson's enthusiasm for the subject coupled with a sensitivity for the context and nuance of the production and reception of geographical knowledge in the late nineteenth century — a mix of both 'evidence' from the field as well as reputations forged far from the ice — ensures that there is much that can be taken from this particular study of the American cultural landscape. One soon realises too that there is a great deal more to be discovered in exploring the imaginations of an American public that looked towards the north in the nineteenth century. (H.W.G. Lewis-Jones, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge, CB2 1ER.)

ANTARCTICA CRUSING GUIDE. Peter Carey and Craig Franklin. 2006. Wellington, New Zealand: AWA Press. v + 233 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-9582629-4-2. \$US25.95; \$NZ39.99.
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As is evident from the title, *Antarctica cruising guide* is aimed primarily at ship-borne tourists to the region. It is a small, compact publication designed to fit easily in the pocket of most red parkas, and is both a wildlife field guide and gives a brief description of 11 'landing' sites

in the South Shetland Islands, and 14 sites on and around the Antarctic Peninsula. *Antarctica cruising guide* does not include sites in any other location, on the grounds that the vast majority of tourists visit the Peninsula region, and the guide is written for them. The book is lavishly illustrated throughout, with photographs taken mainly by the authors. It is worth buying for the illustrations alone.

The book is divided into four basic sections. First, there is an introduction to Antarctica, comprising sections on physical geography, geology, and glaciology. The section concludes with a very quick summary on 'political Antarctica,' which includes a description of territorial claims and the origins of the Antarctic Treaty and the Environmental Protocol. There is also a page on 'Antarctica facts and figures,' which is plagued by the common problem of there being no consistency among differing publications regarding the mean thickness of the ice sheet, the area of summer and winter ice cover, and even the precise height of the Vinson Massif.

The second section describes some of the landing sites and scenic spots in the South Shetland Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula. These are well done. They comprise a short block of text, accompanied by photographs of the site, the wildlife that might be expected, and some of the scenery. There is also a summary of information, so the visitor can see at a glance what might be expected. For example, the entry for Half Moon Island has as its main points of interest the Argentine base, the chinstrap penguin colony, lichens and mosses, and the remains of a wooden boat. A second column itemises the specific wildlife that might be seen, with the page number on which that particular species is described.

The third section comprises the bulk of the book, and is a description of the wildlife to be found in the region. Serious birdwatchers or biologists will prefer more detailed guides, but for the beginner, *Antarctica cruising guide* is clear, succinct, and easy to use. It begins with a brief overview of the terrestrial ecosystem, with a report on plants and land-based animals. Then there is an overview of the marine ecosystem, with sections on the Southern Ocean, the marine food web, plankton, sea-floor dwelling organisms, fish, and other vertebrates. Next comes birds, divided into seabirds and penguins, followed by mammals, with sections on whales and seals. This is perhaps the book's greatest strength, and contains some of the best photographs of Antarctic wildlife I have seen. Neither of the authors is a professional photographer, but their combined illustrations show an attention to detail and a desire to capture some of the sights with which any experienced Antarctic will identify — for example, a southern giant petrel with a red-stained face after feasting on a freshly dead seal (page 104), a black-browed albatross 'running' across a calm sea to take off (page 116), a group of Adélie penguins leaping off an ice floe (page 159), and the pink, gaping maw of a sleepy leopard seal (page 180). These make a pleasant change from the standard 'bird standing in the water' shots of many field guides.