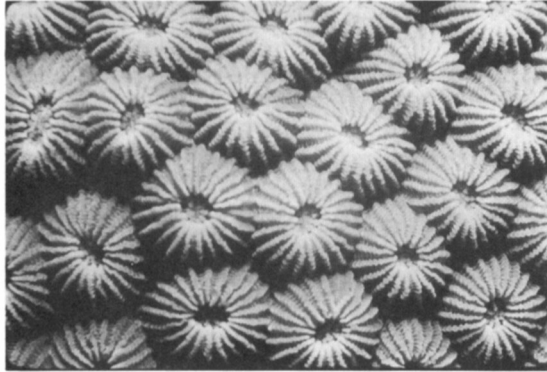


# Book reviews



The faviid coral *Diploastrea heliopora* (from *Corals of the World*).

diversity is not always directly related to taxonomic variation. Many corals alter their growth form according to environmental conditions producing, for example, fragile branching colonies in sheltered water and squat compact ones on exposed parts of the reef. Colour is also an unreliable guide as it depends on the type of symbiotic algae living within the coral tissues. The detailed patterning of the skeleton provides important characteristics, but this means that a specimen has to be brought to the surface, cleaned, dried and studied with a microscope.

For many people, the most valuable part of *Corals of the World* will be the colour photos of the living animals, most of which were taken underwater by the author. These permit a quick preliminary identification of corals seen on the reef, before the detailed keys and accounts are consulted. The complexity of the coral skeleton is explained with clear line drawings and a glossary helps to unravel some of the mysteries of 'coral jargon'. Atlantic and Pacific corals are treated separately, with a key for each group, and maps which indicate the world distribution of each genus. The descriptions include information on ecology, etymology of the Latin name (few corals have common names which often deters non-specialists), a black and white photo of the skeleton and a discussion of other corals with which confusion might arise. In most cases, identification is taken only to genus level but for those seeking further detail there is an extensive bibliography. The book includes a general account of reefs and comments on their present distribution around the world.

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Slightly larger than a field guide, the book is nevertheless compact enough to take on snorkelling or diving trips and will be invaluable to student expeditions and anyone carrying out reef survey work. Reefs throughout the world are coming under increasing threat from man's activities but remarkably few have been mapped, described or studied in any detail. Although many reserves and national parks border coral reefs and many reef areas have been proposed for protection, there are still remarkably few fully functioning coral reef reserves. *Corals of the World* will be a valuable contribution to efforts to safeguard the future of one of the worlds most valuable resources.

Susan Wells  
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Cambridge, UK

## Hawaiian Birdlife, 2nd edition

Andrew J. Berger

University of Hawaii Press, 1981, \$29.95

The average birder is unlikely to read this book unless he or she is thinking of visiting Hawaii. As it happens, I *am* an average birder due to go to Hawaii in a few months' time, so I *have* read *Hawaiian Birdlife* . . . well, most of it. It is a big book, with an enormous amount of information in it, and yet it doesn't really tell me what I want to know. There is no easily checkable systematic list with clear statements of present status. There are no local maps, nor details of the best bird-watching sites. Notes on identification are inadequate; and the few pages of excellent photos are balanced up by many more pages of curiously dreadful illustrations. Nevertheless, Mr Berger would no doubt claim that most things are covered *somewhere* in here, and he would be right. The problem is he seems to be a scientist who is chucking in everything he knows without worrying much about readability or practicality. This is a tome abounding with accounts of esoteric experiments and references, in a style that veers from the naïve to the abstruse. One section begins 'Relative to gulls . . . terns are small slim graceful birds' . . . and ends with details of 'the high incidence of parasitism by nasal mites on five-month-old chicks.' I cannot help thinking that any birdwatcher who does not know what a tern

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looks like is not going to be too riveted by its nasal mites.

I suppose the fact is, this is more of a history book; and, alas, a pretty depressing history it is—largely a sad tale of the decimation of the Hawaiian Islands' avifauna through years of predation and deprivation by rats, cattle, rabbits and modern agriculture—all introduced, of course, by man, who has tried to salve his conscience by also introducing Hawaii's incongruous open aviary of 'exotic' birds.

Fortunately, during the last year or so some conservation consciousness is growing in Hawaii, and there is definitely much magical wildlife still to be seen. That is why I'm going! I dare say I shall appreciate this book much more as a work of reference after I get back. It is clearly meant for the 'ornithologist'. Like I said . . . I'm just an 'average birder' (though I do know a tern when I see one!).

Bill Oddie  
Writer and broadcaster

**Species at Risk: Research in Australia**  
Proceedings of a Symposium on the  
Biology of Rare and Endangered Species  
in Australia, sponsored by the Australian  
Academy of Science and held in  
Canberra, 25 and 26 November 1981  
Edited by R.H. Groves and W.D.L. Ride  
Springer-Verlag, 1982, approximately  
US \$34.10

The editors of this volume have done well to have issued it within a year of the symposium on which it is based. The book includes papers on a variety of general as well as specific (case-study) topics, all of them of Australian concern but with global implications—some of them painful. In the very first paper D.F. McMichael asks 'What, precisely, do we mean by 'at risk'?', and puts the proposition that our limited resources, human as well as financial, simply will not allow us to save all species, and we will increasingly have to draw up priority lists based on clearly articulated criteria. An unpalatable prospect, but one which conservationists will increasingly have to acknowledge: will we have to adopt a programme akin to what disaster specialists call Triage, or will our efforts continue to be *ad hoc*?

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The Case History papers are a mixed bunch. Some trace the history of efforts devoted to saving individual species (the mallee *Eucalyptus caesia*; the orange-bellied parrot; Leadbeater's possum), others ponder the implications of genetic variation, or its lack, for conservation of particular plant and animal species. Briscoe *et al.* even propose a new taxonomy of rock-wallabies and find that one species, *Petrogale godmani*, is in danger of disappearance through genetic introgression. Davies, Smith and Robinson offer a scathing comment on how the penny-pinching habits of a (former) government threatened to overturn the effects of the half-million-plus dollars previously spent on saving the noisy scrub-bird. The series of case-studies ends with a paper by Strahan and Martin on the koala, which as I recall achieved a certain notoriety at the time of the conference and will still shock many people.

The 'Overview' papers that conclude the volume raise again the problems of viable population size (Frankel), the value of rare species (Main), and research and management prospects for rare plants (R.H. Groves) and animals (Ride and Wilson). All authors stress the importance of scientific research as a background to sound conservation. There are even some 'good news' stories. I well remember how at the symposium R.H. Groves showed a slide of 'the only remaining example' of the plant *Stylidium coroniforme*, and the delight of the audience when the botanist S.D. Hopper stood up to announce that the known world population had just been doubled!

There are still success stories to be told, and the opportunities for new successes are probably greater in Australia than anywhere else. In this business-like report conservationists will find the problems aired and well discussed, and case-studies reviewed; though hard-going for the general reader, the book can be recommended to the practising conservationist both as an exemplar of concepts of universal applicability and for its own sake as a report on one of the world's most important natural biological laboratories.

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