

on the shelf

then he was only too happy to share his passion for seabirds, and ran a seabird identification course as part of the University of Cape Town's winter school.

The new book is the first update to *Seabirds* since the second edition was published in 1991, so it has had a 30-year gestation period. Harrison has spent much of this time leading nature tours and in the process seeing the few species of seabird that eluded him prior to publishing his first book.

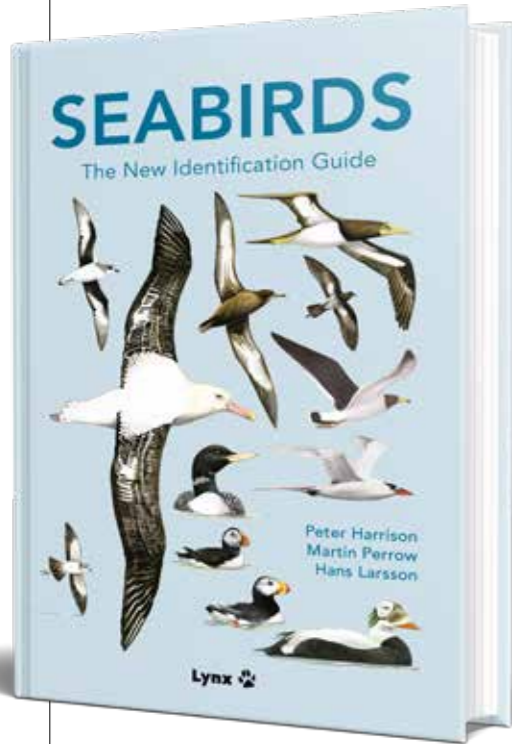
The new *Seabirds* is styled to match the original in terms of size and appearance, but the page layout is very different. Whereas the original had the plates with brief identification points followed by the detailed species accounts, with the distribution maps at the back, the new book follows a more conventional – and convenient – field guide format, with the text and range maps opposite the plates.

Another major change is the adoption of the 'new' taxonomic sequence,

starting with ducks and putting the penguins and tube-nosed seabirds towards the back of the book. However, there are two deviations for practical identification purposes: the two families of storm petrels are grouped together and the noddies are kept with the terns.

The groups covered are the same as the original *Seabirds*, with the sheathbills retained as honorary seabirds. The 26 sea ducks are treated in detail for the first time, 21 from the northern hemisphere and five from southern South America. Sadly, neither Kelp Goose (which was in the original) nor Cape Barren Goose made the grade. Once again all grebes are covered, including several species confined to Andean mountain lakes that never get near the sea.

The new edition covers 433 species, about 100 more than the original, thanks to the many splits that have occurred since the 1980s. Some of the species recognised have yet to gain wide



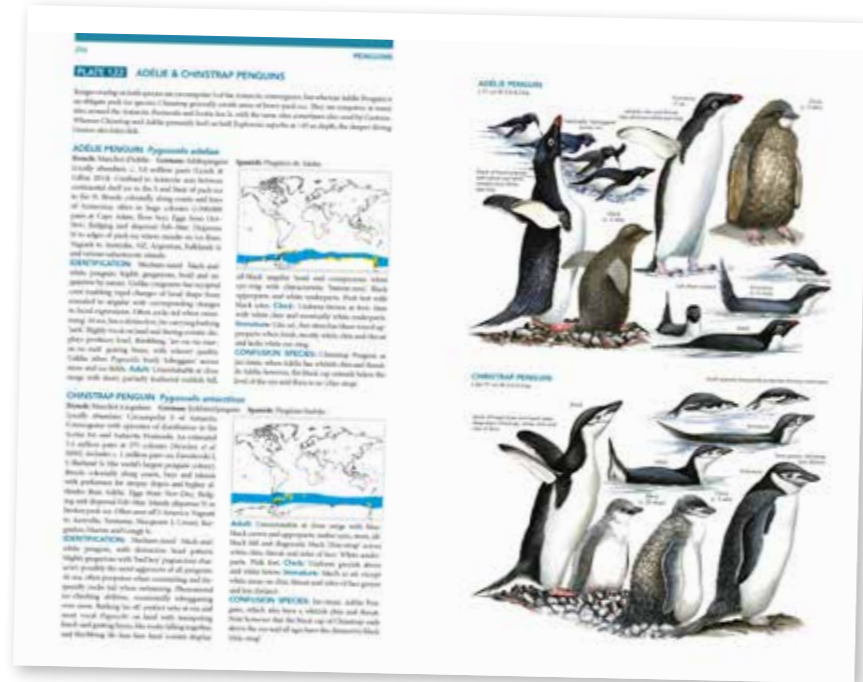
SEABIRDS The New Identification Guide

Peter Harrison, Martin Perrow and Hans Larsson

Hardback, 600 pages. €75.
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Lynx Edicions

It was with much anticipation that I received my copy of Peter Harrison's long-awaited successor to his classic guide to the world's seabirds. Published by Croom Helm in 1983, *Seabirds: An Identification Guide* was so successful that it was translated into several different languages and spawned the series of Croom Helm guides to various groups of birds.

Harrison's love of seabirds started in Cornwall, but in 1973 he set out on a seven-year trip around the world to gain first-hand experience of the world's seabirds. His travels brought him to Cape Town, where he had the opportunity to travel to the Southern Ocean as part of the South African National Antarctic Programme. Even



acceptance on world lists, but Harrison has not gone quite as far as Howell and Zúfelt's *Oceanic Birds of the World* in splitting the noddies, petrels and storm petrels. However, Harrison does give full treatments to many distinctive subspecies and hybrid complexes. For example, although he only recognises 26 species of *Larus* gulls, the species accounts cover 35 'species', including both the widespread *L. dominicanus dominicanus* and the Cape/Khoisan Gull *L. d. vetula*. The book even includes a few undescribed species, such as the 'New Caledonian Storm Petrel', based on repeated observations of hitherto unknown seabirds at sea.

Harrison painted all the plates for his original *Seabirds*, but recruited renowned Swedish bird illustrator Hans Larsson to paint the gulls, terns, skuas and sea ducks for the new edition. Larsson is eminently qualified for this role, having already illustrated most of these groups for other acclaimed field guides. The remainder of the plates by Harrison have the same feel as those in the original *Seabirds*. They are functional, but not as true to life as some of the more recent seabird illustrations by John Gale or Faansie Peacock.

PERHAPS THE STRONGEST PART OF THE BOOK IS THE TEXT. HERE THE WEALTH OF HARRISON'S MANY YEARS OF FIELD EXPERIENCE SHINES THROUGH

The range maps are largely taken from the *Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World* (2014) and it is unfortunate that they weren't updated to reflect recent discoveries. The ranges of many pelagic species are conservative, not showing areas where species are scarce visitors, which results in frequent discrepancies between the maps and the ranges reported in the text. Several species on the southern African list are not shown as coming anywhere near the region.

Perhaps the strongest part of the book is the text. Here the wealth of Harrison's many years of field experience shines through. Martin Perrow, a UK-based researcher and birder, helped to write the rich and insightful text. Although the main focus is on identification, the introductory texts highlight aspects of seabird ecology and evolution, and the

species accounts cover population size, distribution, movements and breeding biology. The text is supported by numerous references to the recent scientific literature, which are listed in full at the end of the book.

Roger Tory Peterson's foreword hailed the original *Seabirds* as a 'red-letter event for the field glass fraternity'. The new edition lacks a foreword, but it's worth reading Peter Harrison's preface, which chronicles a life spent not only in pursuit of seabirds, but also devoted to their conservation. This is a must-have book for all lovers of seabirds.

PETER RYAN

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