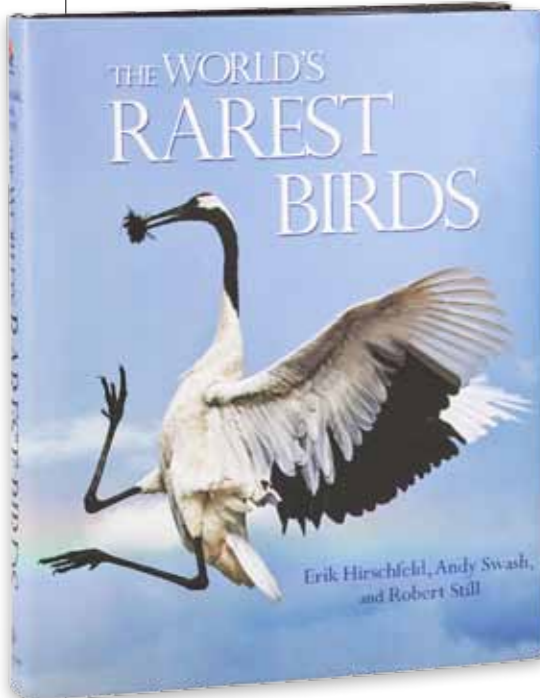


reviews YOU CAN use



THE WORLD'S RAREST BIRDS

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them, even in this age of digital photography and booming global birding tourism.

Paging through the book I was constantly attracted to species that I know. There are so many of them, it's staggering. Although I'm acutely aware of the dire conservation status of seabirds because it's my job to know this, it's nonetheless pulse-quickening to see all 17 of the Threatened, Endangered and Critically Endangered albatrosses in a colour-coded table, with the green Near Threatened species conspicuously few in number (five) rounding out the group, and no Least Concern albatrosses on the planet.

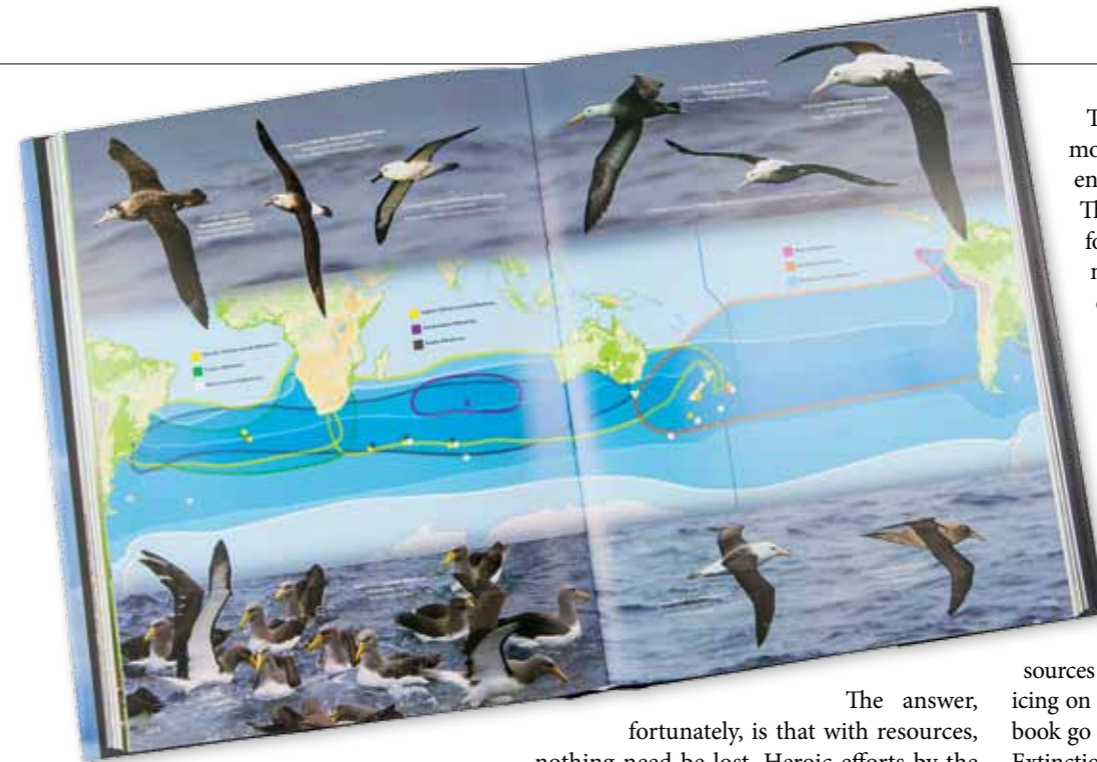
The albatrosses are among the lucky ones. There's an entire international treaty – the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels – set up specifically to deal with their conservation problems. And because of albatrosses' charismatic, semi-mystical appeal to many people, there's plenty of effort and money going into their conservation. BirdLife South Africa's award-winning Albatross Task Force is a good example of why we should be less worried about albatrosses than their status suggests. This and other teams have shown it's possible to reduce seabird bycatch in fisheries to negligible levels. There is hope, and indeed the text dealing with the albatrosses chimes in some notes of hope amid the generally quite gloomy reading.

As a researcher, my two obsessions are seabirds and islands (which are not mutually exclusive topics, of course). So again, it's no surprise to me that, in addition to all the seabirds, a great many of the birds in this book are islanders. These two themes link my research and professional interests: protecting

seabirds at sea and eradicating from islands the invasive mammals that are responsible for so much of the woe contained in this beautiful book. This too gives reason for optimism, albeit in relatively small doses in this publication. There are several sections which highlight 'threatened bird hotspots' (which are depressingly abundant, speaking to the widespread nature of the destruction humanity has wrought), and many make reference to the huge gains that eradications have delivered (or may yet deliver).

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Some projects in the past decade have really pushed the envelope. Isabella Island in the Galápagos Archipelago (more than 4 600 square kilometres; cleared of goats), and Macquarie Island south-west of Tasmania (128 square kilometres; cats eradicated, rabbits, rats and mice probably eradicated but requiring final verification) are just two examples of what's possible. The plans to exterminate rodents from Lord Howe Island



(where the eponymous, endangered Woodhen, Phoenix Petrel and a number of other bird species breed) will be the first to tackle rodents on an inhabited island. The regeneration of island life once these pests are removed is quite something to behold. Closer to home but in the less recent past, the elimination of cats from South Africa's Marion Island (290 square kilometres) remains the largest island from which these extraordinarily efficient bird predators have been removed.

While the seabirds may be punching above their weight in this book, there are some surprises that the new edition reveals. First World, highly developed nations are faring as abysmally in protecting their landbirds as small island developing states are. Extinction-risk hotspots include Australia, the USA (Hawaii) and the UK (all its overseas territories). Clearly these countries have more money than sense (and/or a serious lack of appreciation for stunningly beautiful birds), for if Australia's Orange-bellied Parrots (fewer than 40 birds) or Hawaii's Maui Island Akohekohe (2 500 birds) continue to disappear, what hope is there?

SPECIAL OFFER!

If you would like to obtain a copy of this book, you can take advantage of our special offer. *African Birdlife* readers in South Africa can buy it direct from the publisher at 30% off the published price of US\$45 (postage and packaging to be added). Please e-mail sales@upguk.com or tel. +44 1243 84 2165 and quote offer reference *African Birdlife*.



There's little that can inspire people more than stunning images of threatened places or endangered species. The natural affinity that humans have for animals, and especially for birds, makes this book more inspiring than depressing, even though it's a sobering read. The natural appeal of the subject is borne out by the acknowledgements, where there is an extensive list of photographers who have given their images at no cost for this project (for it *is* a project, rather than a conventional book).

By shining the spotlight on the sharp end of bird conservation the book raises awareness and, hopefully, additional re-

sources to protect the birds portrayed. The answer, fortunately, is that with resources, nothing need be lost. Heroic efforts by the likes of Nature Seychelles and the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation, both tiny organisations in tiny Third World islands, have brought species such as Mauritius Kestrel, Pink Pigeon and Seychelles Warbler back from the very edge of extinction, testament to the fact that with a bit of money and a lot of will, extinction is not inevitable.

The icing on the cake? Proceeds from sales of this book go to BirdLife International's Preventing Extinctions Programme, so, while comfortably ensconced in your gown and slippers and marvelling at the birds, or planning your next birding mission, you can feel even better about the purchase, knowing you're assisting some of the world's most desperately in need birds.

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