

## Book reviews

### Digital birds at your fingertips

BirdGuides Ltd.: BWPi. The Birds of the Western Palearctic on interactive DVD-ROM. Oxford University Press & BirdGuides. 2004. System Requirements: Windows 98, 2000 and XP, Macintosh OSX 10.2 and 10.3. High resolution display recommended, and Quick Time (installers provided).

I am a book man! And silly and old-fashioned enough to be proud of my personal library, well over 100 metres of bookshelves filled with books and journals on birds. It is an inimitable feeling when tasting an emerging idea in my mind, and at the same time probing possible books for developing it further. However, in a small house like mine, it is a problem to find room for four children who are against living in a dusty library. Almost one metre of literature can now be exchanged for a single DVD-ROM. I am modern enough to admit that digital media (CD-ROMs or DVDs), when professionally planned, edited and organized, are very good for rapidly finding an answer to a specific question. *BWPi* is such a product. Its navigation is intuitive and easily learnt, and it is quick in use.

*BWPi* includes *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, The Middle East and North Africa*, known as Cramp & Simmons by every ornithologist. *BWPi* contains the full text from all nine volumes of the Handbook, as well as that from the two volumes of the concise edition, and 40 revised species accounts published in the *BWP Update* (in total, six million words). All the reference literature is listed. All artwork and maps are included, totalling 5,500 individual plumage illustrations enhanced with new optional annotations highlighting identification points. The line drawings, egg plates, and annual cycle diagrams are informative with clear titles. *BWPi* includes photographs of mainly nests and eggs. Especially informative are 2,300 video clips, which provide over ten hours of video – a user can really watch the birds behaving in their natural way. They can be analyzed frame by frame

at any size. These videos give a good image of behavioural traits and postures of more than 800 species. Many of the very short shots are, however, of rather poor amateur quality. If one is really interested in identification and behaviour of the Palearctic birds and wants to see more professional films, long-playing videos of various bird groups are available from several companies, including BirdGuides Ltd. Over 1,000 sound recordings of songs and calls of over 550 species have been included in *BWPi*. These recordings cannot cover but a minority of possible calls and – again – more detailed coverage has been included in other digital media (especially the 17-CD set *Die Vogelstimmen Europas, Nordafrikas und Vorderasiens*).

From the *BWPi* DVD, users can find information on birds grouped by families and species, listed either in systematic or alphabetic order. The species and family names can be chosen in 16 languages. With a search engine, one can look for information using a word or phrasing. Information from two species or variations within the same species can be compared by multiple navigators and browsers simultaneously, which is an effective method in, for example, identification or comparison of breeding, migration and other ecological variables. Any image or piece of text or video can be compared side-by-side. All images and a set of them can be viewed at any size. This is a real strength of digital media. In addition, a user can add to the contents his or her own photographs or enter information to the species accounts.

Although *BWPi* is a good device for finding very quickly all kind of information on bird species of the Western Palearctic, it is a typical representative of the first generation digital media: A book put into electronic format. In *BWPi*, the navigation is based on taxonomic units like families or species, just like in the respective books. There are actually very limited possibilities for more interaction, and for finding information at other than the species' level. It is not possible, for example, to study birds in different geographical areas, or in different habitats. Making truly digital media is a

different task from writing a book. I can illustrate this point with personal experience. After writing several books on Finnish birds, I was asked ten years ago to join a group for planning and writing texts to a CD-ROM on Finnish birds, *Suomen Linnut CD-Fakta*. In addition to a *BWPI*-like handbook, with animation for all species with migration routes and time-tables, other more interactive sections were included. For example, the user can list characters of an unknown bird seen in the field, and the programme returns a list of candidate species. In a third section, picking a point from a map gives a list of birds observed during two atlas projects, or a list of species possible to observe per two-week periods around the year. A fourth section provides a virtual birding trip in various kinds of habitats, showing typical species to be seen. All these sections are fully integrated with each other, for finding quickly more relevant information of any question in other sections. Such interactive elements are currently lacking from the *BWPI*, and a better exploration of the interactive possibilities that digital media offer is a future challenge for the development of *BWPI*.

At this point, I could also point out that there is another comparable, but perhaps poorly known, CD-ROM of the European birds: *Handbuch der Vögel Mitteleuropas*. It includes 24 volumes (exactly one metre!) of the German handbook with the same title. Unfortunately, (too) few ornithologists understand German, the former international language of ornithology. Although some information in the first volumes of the *Handbuch* are somewhat out of date, this *magnum opus* by Glutz and others remains the most detailed and accurate handbook of birds ever published.

Notwithstanding my general critics on the level of interaction in *BWPI*, I guarantee it is worth the money; either one has the Handbook or not. From the *BWPI* DVD it is so easy and efficient to find information and compare texts, figures, maps, videos and songs between species. On the other hand, one must remember that there may arise compatibility problems in the near future, with computers developing so rapidly. A book has remained a superior way of packing information for over two thousand years. That is why I will not throw away my sets of books, although I would gain considerable shelf space!

**Pertti Koskimies**

## The Good Bird Guide – bongarin lintuopas Eurooppaan, Pohjois-Afrikkaan ja Lähi-Itään

Marsh, K. 2005: The Good Bird Guide. – A&C Black, London. 496 pp. (ISBN 9780713668483)

Marshin lintuopas on suunnattu aktiiviselle lintuharrastajalle ja/tai bongarille, joka haluaa Euroopan, Pohjois-Afrikan ja Lähi-Idän alueella nähdä itseltään puuttuvat lajit niiden tyyppiympäristössään. Toisaalta hän voi suunnitella matkansa ja lomansa joidenkin harvinaisempien ja esimerkiksi Suomesta heikommin tavattavien lajien elinpiiriin mukaan. Jos aikaa retkeilyyn on vähän, voi tämän kirjan avulla suunnitella ”täsmäiskuja” kohteisiin, joissa tiettyjä lajeja esiintyy ympäristöään runsaammin tai useammin.

Marshin kirja antaa vinkkejä 435 ”kiinnostavan ja vaikeasti tavoitettavan” lajin löytämiseksi noin 550 lintupaikan avulla kaikkiaan 64 maan alueelta. Alueellisten erikoisuuksien ja luultavasti myös itse maasta olevan tiedon ja kokemuksen määräästä johtuen maakohtaisten lintukohteiden lukumäärä vaihtelee huomattavasti (esim. Georgian on esitelty 4, Suomesta 20 ja Espanjasta 21 kohdetta). Kohteet on valittu pitäen silmällä alueellisia erikoisuuksia. Esimerkiksi Suomessa on Euroopan mittakaavassa parhaat mahdollisuudet nähdä sinipyrstö ja Fennoskandia on kokonaisuudessaan hyvää ”pöllömaastoa”, joten retkikohteet painottuvat mm. näiden lajien tyyppiympäristöihin. Lajit on järjestetty kirjaan viimeisimpien lintuoppaiden käyttämän taksonomisen järjestyksen mukaisesti.

Jokaisesta esittelystä lintulajista on tiivis kuvaus pesimä- ja talvehtimisalueista sekä vinkkejä erikoisista tai luonteenomaisista pesimähabitaattivaatimuksista. Jos lajista esiintyy eri alueilla alalajeja, ne on lueteltu erikseen. Lajiesittely sisältää myös hieman harjoitusta vaativat lyhenteet (selitykset alussa) tavanomaisista elinympäristöistä ja muuttokäyttäytymisestä. Lajin esiintymisen esittelyn jälkeen seuraa aakkosellinen lista maista (ja niissä olevista lintupaikoista), joissa kyseistä lajia on mahdollisuus nähdä. Kaikille ”hot spoteille” on annettu 0–3 tähteä sen mukaan, kuinka ”todennäköistä on nähdä kyseinen laji asianmukaisena aikana kyseisessä kohteessa.” Kolme tähteä merkitsee 75–100 %:n todennäköisyyttä jne. Kysei-

nen merkintäjärjestelmä on suuntaa-antava ja siihen tulisi suhtautua varauksella, sillä itse en ainkaan lähtisi tiukalla aikataululla esimerkiksi Ahvenanmaalle metsoja katsomaan ilman viimeisiä lintuatlastietoja. Samaten uskallan väittää, että tundraurpiaisia löytyy Suomesta muualtakin kuin Kevon alueelta (listalla on lintukohteina mm. Kilpisjärvi–Saana). En toisin sanoen lähtisi kovin suurin odotuksin hakemaan elämänpisteitä paikkoihin, jotka on kyseisen lajin kohdalta varustettu 0–1 tähdellä.

Lajiesittelyn jälkeen kirjassa on vielä maa-/aluekohtainen hakemisto lintupaikoista. Yleinen kiinnostus lintuja kohtaan tulee varmaan maassa kuin maassa tyydytettyä ainakin jossain määrin, jos retkikohteensa valitsee paikkojen perusteella. Paikoista on lyhyesti kuvattu habitaatit ja lueteltu alueen kiinnostavimmat lajit (esim. Kuusamosta sinipyrstö). Tämän lisäksi useimmille kohteille on yksinkertaistetut ajoohjeet paikalle löytämiseksi.

**Pekka Kontiainen**