

Introduction

Richard and Sarah Thomas

In late 1990, when Sarah and I left the UK and travelled to Australia, the first bird we saw on arrival at Sydney airport was a Welcome Swallow. It was an appropriate species, because throughout our time in the country we were always made to feel most welcome indeed. The early 1990s were quite simply some of the happiest years.

While there, we put in a great deal of time and effort into trying to see as much of the country – and of course the bird life – as we were able. Our success, particularly in the latter, is in no small part down to the many kind and helpful characters and great friends who form the core of the Australian birding scene.

Little did I imagine, on our return to the UK in 1994, that together Sarah and I were to write what was to become *the* bird finding guide to Australia. I hope that all those who have followed in our footsteps have enjoyed the experience of birding in some of the best locations on Earth, and enjoyed the experience as much as we did.

Looking back, it was quite a gamble when we ploughed our savings into the first print run of 1000 copies. I recall our trepidation when a lorry arrived from the printers at our rented accommodation and, unable to access the narrow drive, deposited the books at the gateposts. The mountain of books was a daunting sight, but 2 months later we had sold out and were ordering a second print run, this time of 2000 copies. The rest, as they say, is history.

I should make special mention of Mike Bell, with whom we shared that house: he never batted an eyelid as his living room filled with books and packing materials, nor complained (too much) when the phone/fax machine in his bedroom roused him with orders or phone calls from Australia in the dead of night.

Now, almost 15 years later, an overhaul of our first edition is long overdue, and Sarah and I were delighted when David and Alan approached us to do just that. I hope the new edition, which is light years ahead of the original in terms of appearance and content (yes, some of the labels are wonky on the old maps – they were glued on and lined up by eye), will prove to be as invaluable to a new generation of both resident and visiting birders to Australia as its predecessor was.