

## HBW ALIVE www.hbw.com



It's no exaggeration to call *The Handbook of the Birds of the World* one of the most significant ornithological publications of all time. Commonly referred to as *HBW*, this monumental 17-volume tome covers every known extant species, and represents an incomparable resource to anyone who has more

than a passing interest in birds. But the era of the printed book is inexorably drawing to an end and it came as no great surprise when Lynx Edicions recently announced HBW Alive, the online version of the series.

When HBW Alive was launched in July, I signed up with alacrity. Individual access is via one of two annual packages, either a basic subscription for €29.95 or a supporting subscription for €44.95 – both very reasonable considering the incredible amount of information made available. Both packages give you access to the family and species accounts (and, of course, the species illustrations for which *HBW* has received justifiable acclaim), by way of an easily-navigable interface. Subscribers can generate customised plates containing members of a family or genus of interest. In addition, searches can be filtered geographically and results restricted to continents, regions and/or countries.

The species and family accounts include clickable links to geo-referenced photographs, sound clips and/or videos archived in Lynx's Internet Bird Collection, adding an entirely new dimension to them. (These media may not be accessible from all mobile devices; I was unable to play sound clips or videos when browsing the site on an iPad.) But to my mind the single most significant aspect of HBW Alive is that all the content is continuously



updated, ensuring that subscribers can access the most current information available on a species or family. In addition, supporting subscribers will be able to access PDFs of many of the papers listed in the bibliography. There are other features too numerous to mention here; many are highlighted in the introductory video on the home page.

Although scrolling down a computer screen will probably never be able to match the sheer joy of paging through the beautifully illustrated family accounts of the original *HBW*, I for one am delighted that this amazing compilation of ornithological information is now accessible electronically. The team at Lynx Edicions deserves full kudos for yet another ground-breaking product that takes global ornithology further into the 21st century.

ANDREW McKECHNIE

## TAKEN CAPTIVE BY BIRDS

Marguerite Poland; illustrated by  
Craig Ivor

Penguin Books

Hardcover, dustjacket; 143 pages. R250.

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Marguerite Poland is a versatile and prolific author, well known for her delightful children's stories, but also for her more serious novels and her historical biography of St Andrew's College. In addition, she contributed the text for *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni Cattle of the Zulu People*, so beautifully illustrated by Leigh Voigt.

This memoir is a nostalgic return to her roots in the Eastern Cape at her home 'Kwezintaka' (the Place of Birds), which was subsequently changed to a more prosaic 'Penderley'. But for Marguerite it remained a place of birds: the ominous Spotted Eagle-Owl at the bottom of the garden, dikkops, the robin and the thrush, the doves, the shrikes and, although just a nocturnal voice, most beloved of all, the Fiery-necked Nightjar.

This book is not so much about birds as the memories they evoked of a bygone era. Fluent in isiXhosa, she incorporates many onomatopoeic bird names as well as some observations of behaviour, such as the regular piratical attacks of the resident drongo on the African Hoopoe.

The text is a tapestry of recollections woven on the loom of a happy and secure childhood, and her family features prominently in her stories. Her evocative text is greatly enhanced by the delightful monochrome sketches of Craig Ivor and his skill is exceptional.

PETER STEYN

