

BOOK REVIEW

Gulls of the World: A Photographic Guide, by Klaus Malling Olsen. 2018. Princeton University Press, 368 pp. Many photos, maps, and two pages of line drawings. Hardcover, \$45.00. ISBN 978-0-691-18059-5.

At last, larophiles have a portable guide to all the world's gulls. Recent guides to this subfamily covered only the Northern Hemisphere (Malling Olsen and Larsson 2003, 2004) or the Western Hemisphere (Howell and Dunn 2007). Another recent treatment of identification of the world's gulls (Burger and Gochfeld 1996), in volume 3 of del Hoyo et al. (1992–2013), was necessarily brief and contained in a volume weighing 4.5 kg, hardly appropriate for field use.

As the subtitle of this volume attests, the author has endeavored to provide a photo (in many cases, more than one) of each stage of molt of each taxon, in many cases in flight and standing poses. The publisher's website advertises "more than 600" photos, but there are in fact over 800 photos, not counting those in the front matter. Although the author states this volume is a photographic companion guide to Malling Olsen and Larsson (2004), it functions well on its own and has the added coverage of Southern Hemisphere species. In a sampling I found no photos recycled from the earlier guides.

The volume consists of introductory materials, species accounts, and an index. The introduction addresses the aging and molts of gulls (with photos depicting patterns typical for two-, three-, and four-year gulls); how the timing of molt differs in different geographical areas; problems arising from worn, diseased, abnormal, and oil-stained birds; color differences and the effects of incident light on perceived colors; "jizz"; and hybridization. There is a separate "introduction to the species accounts" and an illustrated two-page spread on gull topography (each of the latter mispaginated in the table of contents).

Each species account includes text on identification (including age to maturity), a description of plumage and bare-part colors of the adult and for each subadult age and season, a paragraph on vocalizations, notes on molt, subspecies if any, hybrids if known, conservation status, habitat and distribution, notes on similar species, and references. There are also one or more maps depicting breeding, nonbreeding, and year-round range (if appropriate). But the bulk of the book consists of the photographic plates.

The species accounts address 61 taxa, more than the 51 species recognized by Burger and Gochfeld (1996) or the 53 recognized by Pons et al. (2005). This difference arises from the author's goal of describing all subspecies recognizable in the field. He expects further investigation "to confirm that they are separate species" (p. 10). Within the species accounts the taxa are classified generically according to Pons et al. (2005) but are presented in the order used by Burger and Gochfeld (1996) "with some exceptions and rearrangements" (p. 10) necessitated by following the classification of Pons et al. (2005) and by the addressing of selected subspecies in separate species accounts. As a result, there is little commonality in the two sequences, except in the genus *Chroicocephalus*.

The ages to maturity Malling Olsen specifies are generally in accordance with recent literature except for the California (*L. californicus*) and Kelp (*L. dominicanus*) Gulls (both specified as "three/four-year" maturities) and the Yellow-footed (*L. livens*) and Heermann's (*L. heermanni*) Gulls (both specified as "three year" maturities). Other recent authorities (e.g., Howell et al. 2007) consider all these four-year gulls.

Not only is each species account accompanied by a map (restricted to the region of interest for species with limited ranges), 6 of the 17 accounts of taxa that include subspecies also have separate maps depicting the ranges of each subspecies. An improvement for the remaining 11 would have been to delineate subspecies ranges by

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dashed lines or the like. One drawback to the maps is they show only the outlines of continents and islands, no interior political boundaries. For example, a North American reader might reasonably be uncertain as to whether the central Asian ranges of Pallas's Gull (*Ichthyaetus ichthyaeus*) or the Relict Gull (*I. relictus*) encompass Kazakhstan. Closer to home, I wondered if the depicted breeding range of the California Gull correctly includes breeding ranges in eastern Oregon and Washington, and if the breeding range depicted in the southwestern U.S. extends into northern Mexico.

Thus arises what I see as a major problem with the maps. I can find no reference anywhere to support the depiction of breeding colonies of the California Gull in the southwestern United States, and, as addressed below, the included references are of little help in this regard. Other maps are problematic as well. That for the Kelp Gull does not depict breeding on Madagascar (a separate subspecies according to the text) and seems to include in the breeding range areas specified in the text as part of the winter range. The post-breeding range of the Pacific Gull (*L. pacificus*) in eastern Australia is not depicted, although it is delineated in the text and represented by one photo from eastern Australia (photo 2, p. 109). I could cite other examples. I recommend that the reader regard the maps as suggestive of the birds' ranges but not rely on the details in them.

The core of the volume is the photographic identification section. Malling Olsen has attempted to present each identifiable plumage of each taxon, juvenile as well as summer and winter (terms he prefers to "alternate" and "basic") plumages for each age class. Nearly half of the photos are of birds in flight, further illustrating plumages already represented by photos of standing birds. Many photos are by the author, but a large number are from other contributors, especially for taxa outside of Europe. Each photo is credited, but it is a pity there is no comprehensive list of photo credits.

I found the photos to be uniformly excellent, high-quality reproductions. The photo captions point out the plumage and soft-part characteristics of each plumage state. The captions also sometimes address structural features that combine to make up a bird's shape, especially important for gulls viewed at a distance. I have almost no quibbles with the author's attribution of age and seasonality to the photos presented. An exception would be photos 22 and 23 (p. 197) of the American Herring Gull (*L. a. smithsonianus*)—the captions seem not to describe the photos well. I suspect a mix-up of photos during production explains this anomaly. I confess that I would be very uncertain attributing an age to the out-of-range California Gull depicted in plate 2 (p. 103). I also would join Howell (2018) in questioning the hypothesized parental mix of the hybrid gull depicted in the photo at the bottom of page 27, thinking it more likely a Glaucous-winged (*L. glaucescens*) × American Herring Gull.

Clearly, the author intends to be comprehensive. Not only are there accounts for at least eight taxa that might receive less attention as subspecies in a more traditional approach, Malling Olsen has descriptions, and often photographs, of 17 additional subspecies within other species accounts. One example of this in-depth treatment is a total of 48 photos encompassing the Mew (*L. canus brachyrhynchus*) and Kamchatka (*L. c. kamtschatschensis*) Gulls separately from the Common Gull (*L. c. canus*).

I was impressed by the author's caution. Several of the photo captions include the word "putative" appended to the assignment of age and molt class. Another photo (13 on p. 106) notes that a feature is atypical for the bird's age. The text often indicates patterns of variability to be expected within a species.

But despite my enthusiasm I found this book hard to use. The order of the species accounts does not follow the most current taxonomic literature (e.g., Pons et al. 2005, Banks et al. 2008), with species closer to the base of this clade earlier in the list. I found my eye running up and down the two-page table of contents to find a species of interest (it is easier if you look for the genus first). Plus, the running heads on the pages are restricted to "Gulls" on the recto and genera on the verso. If, in opening the book, I came upon a spread of photos, I would have to flip back one or more

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pages to discern the species being addressed, since the photo captions don't specify the species (though they do the subspecies, if applicable). A minor irritant is the use of opaque terms such as "banana posture" (p.90), "skirt" (p. 159), and "black bayonets" (p. 199), not included in the topography plate, and there is no glossary. Another inconvenience in a book that covers both the Northern and Southern hemispheres is use of the terms "winter" and "summer" for seasonal plumages.

For me, the most disconcerting feature of this book is the handling of references. References are grouped at the end of each species account, alphabetical by author and date, but without further bibliographic details. There is no clue as to whether the reference is to a peer-reviewed article or monograph, a compendium, or a note in a birding magazine. For the most part I could source the references in the bibliography of Malling Olsen and Larsen (2003) (with at least one cited date incorrect), but not always. An easy fix would be an on-line publication of a bibliography. Many of the references I did find turned out to be secondary sources, such as gull and seabird guides.

Despite the noted drawbacks, I think this volume will function admirably for its intended users: serious gull aficionados who wish to learn more about identification pitfalls and the birder who wants to be prepared to identify a vagrant gull at a hotspot. This book is a size one could pack on an international trip as an identification resource far exceeding a country- or region-specific field guide to birds.

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