

BOOK REVIEW

Demongin, L. (2013) *Guide d'identification des oiseaux en main: les 250 espèces les plus baguées en France*. Laurent Demongin. ISBN 978-274-665-7137

The aim of this guide is to provide to francophone ringers, in their own language, detailed guidance in identifying, ageing and sexing the 250 species most frequently caught by ringers in mainland France. It does not aim to supplant the iconic guides in English by Prater *et al* (1977) for waders, Baker (1993) for other non-passerines and Svensson (1992) for passerines. However its author wishes to augment their work with new criteria, where these have become available, and primarily to provide this information in the French language.

By virtue of its limited scope of 250 species, this guide comprises only 310 pages (in small font) in a single volume, thus providing an immediate practical advantage over the English guides' three separate books. The guide makes good use of cut-out photographs of salient features useful for ageing and sexing. Ringers who do not read French would be able to make use of these photos and other diagrams after learning a few technical terms, which could be achieved by looking at the introductory diagrams showing the different feather tracts used in ageing and sexing.

In reviewing this publication for this journal, a major question to be addressed is whether anglophone ringers would benefit from a translation of *Guide d'identification des oiseaux en main* into English. This reviewer does not have time to read and attempt to understand 250 species accounts and evaluate them against those in the English guides, so has instead compared the accounts for a small selection of non-passerines and passerines.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*: Information given by Demongin appears to be close to Baker's, but is laid out more clearly regarding the four female plumage types and the criteria for ageing and sexing (which are considered together, since ageing criteria differ between the sexes). Demongin's ten illustrations showing the use of greater coverts for ageing and sexing are clearer than Baker's eight, dating from 20 years earlier.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*: Demongin includes paragraphs on moult in juveniles, second-years and adults not included by Prater *et al*. Ageing covers four age groups in autumn and three in spring. Although the text overall reads like that of Prater *et al*, new information is given on the possibility of arrested moult leading to mistaken ageing of adults as immatures in spring. For sexing, Demongin quotes ranges of bill length and depth from southwest England, which were not available to Prater *et al*.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*: Demongin's text on identification and the use of different plumages for ageing appears similar to Baker's. However there is additional information concerning the colours of bill and legs of each age class in autumn and spring.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*: Demongin agrees with Baker that second-year birds often cannot be separated from adults. In addition, Demongin gives information on moult cycles in secondaries not included by Baker, and advises ringers to look at both wings, because secondary moult can differ between them.

Marsh and Willow Tits *Poecile palustris/montana*: Demongin includes several criteria for separation of these species in the hand which, though covered poorly or omitted by Svensson, are available to BTO ringers through the *Ringers' Manual* (Redfern & Clark 2001). Demongin also gives a graph and discriminant function which he states can separate the two species by their wing and tail lengths. For ageing Marsh Tit, Demongin includes a similar tail-shape diagram to Svensson. In addition to post-juvenile moult limits, Demongin suggests that iris colour can be used to age both species.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*: Demongin includes measurements in his wing-formula diagram and has paragraphs on moult of first-years and adults not covered by Svensson (1992). Demongin admits that ageing is difficult. He then goes on to include information on moult limits and iris colour not included by Svensson, while dismissing tongue colours as unreliable (tongue spots are mentioned by Svensson, quoting a correspondent).

Common and Lesser Redpolls *Acanthis flammea/cabaret*: Demongin takes care to give detailed guidance to separate these two taxa, which in Britain were separated only at subspecific level when Svensson published his latest edition. As well as plumage characters useful for their separation, Demongin also gives lengthy guidance to enable both to be separated from *A. hornemanni*. He also points out that sometimes it will prove impossible to make a reliable identification.

In conclusion, Demongin appears to offer little additional material in the treatment of non-passerines compared with the English-language guides. Thus there would be little advantage for anglophone ringers in seeking a translation. For passerines, however, Demongin provides more information than Svensson,

often laid out more clearly. This is achieved partly by including fewer species, since the geographical scope is more limited. Readers who do not understand French can benefit from the photos and diagrams.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03078698.2014.932620>

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