My first encounter with the Southern Ocean was sailing from Southampton to Antarctica in 1970. The only guide we had was Alexander’s Birds of the Ocean, and we struggled to identify many of the birds we saw. Since then several new guides have appeared, most recently Shirihai’s outstanding Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife (A&C Black, 2007), and we have also made great strides in our understanding of the identification and distribution of Southern Ocean seabirds. Many birds previously thought of as rare or unusual are now seen routinely from the research vessels and tourist ships that visit Antarctica.

This new guide takes a quite different approach from that of all previous guides to the area, reflecting the rapid changes in field-guide format and philosophy of the past few years. The first section of the book (68 pages) provides detailed background information covering topics such as descriptions of the environment, conservation and tourism, including advice on how to choose a trip to Antarctica. These are very good, and include a nice clear introduction to the different groups of birds and marine mammals that are likely to be encountered.

The main part of the book is divided into three sections, presenting the birds and marine mammals likely to be encountered in the Beagle Channel, the Drake Passage and at the Antarctic Peninsula. Each species has a short description, an outline of where to look for it, and a short ‘talking point’ giving incidental information such as the derivation of the name, behaviour, and so on. Opposite the description are a series of carefully selected, high-quality, photographic images, skilfully arranged as a montage against a background image representing the habitat. Personally I remain ambivalent over the value of photographs for identification, and this guide contains good examples of their strengths and weaknesses. The cetacean photos are very good and, coupled with useful diagrams showing diving behaviour, will undoubtedly help with identification. While the seabird images are technically excellent, in my view the images of diving-petrels Pelecanoides do nothing to help with the identification of this tricky group, and the plate showing Sooty Shearwater Puffinus griseus and White-chinned Petrel Procellaria aequinoctialis makes two species which appear quite different at sea look almost indistinguishable. Furthermore, the tripartite structure means that some widely distributed species (for example, Kelp Gull Larus dominicanus) mentioned in only one section have to be searched for.

Despite its title, this book is not a guide to Antarctic wildlife. Rather, it is intended for those with a general interest in natural history joining a cruise to the Antarctic Peninsula from South America and wanting a small guide covering the birds and animals they might see in this small part of Antarctica. In this the book succeeds admirably. I do feel, however, that the author has missed a valuable trick in not covering South Georgia, which is included on the itinerary of many Antarctic cruises. While some rarely recorded species are included (for example, Mottled Petrel Pterodroma inexpectata), there is no mention anywhere of commoner species such as Grey-backed Storm-petrel Garrodia nereis or South Georgia Diving-petrel Pelecanoides georgicus. These small points aside, the book achieves its aims and should sell well. Birders visiting other parts of Antarctica, however, will probably choose to take Shirihai, if they can lift it.

Andrew Clarke
This new field guide from Lynx Edicions is, in a sense, a spin-off from the Handbook of the Birds of the World (HBW) in that the vast majority of the illustrations used in the plates are taken from HBW. Apparently, a few additional illustrations have been commissioned to illustrate plumages or ages not available in the HBW plates. Consequently, the book has a familiar feel to it (at least to fans of HBW), though the clash of styles apparent when using the artwork of 25 different artists is sometimes too evident (see, for example, the plate of African Blue Tits Cyanistes teneriffe). The book contains a very brief introduction, a full coded checklist for each of the island groups, a fairly detailed bibliography and a species index. The remaining pages are taken up with the plates and the pages of text and distribution maps (laid out opposite the plates).

The texts cover measurements, identification, voice, status/habitat, and (sometimes) taxonomy. These seem accurate and adequate for the purpose of this guide. Maps are not included for vagrants; instead, a list of islands where the species has occurred is given under status/habitat.

A practical problem faced by books dealing with island groups that attract large numbers of vagrants is readily evident. This guide deals with 573 species, but only 144 of these breed. A further 51 species are winter visitors, 70 are passage migrants, and a whopping 291 occur only as vagrants. In other words, over half the species dealt with are vagrants that one is unlikely to encounter on a visit to any of these islands, with the possible exception of a visit to the Azores in autumn. There is no easy solution but it means that the resident (and often endemic) species, which are perhaps of most interest to visiting birders, are rather swallowed up among a mass of largely irrelevant species from elsewhere. I wonder whether it might have been better to divide the book into two halves, the first dealing with breeders, winter visitors and migrants, and the second with the vagrants (as in the well-liked Shell Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland – Michael Joseph, 1983).

Of course, this is not the first field guide to this region. In 2006, Christopher Helm published the Field Guide to the Birds of the Atlantic Islands: Canary Islands, Madeira, Azores, Cape Verde, by Tony Clarke. A review of that title appeared in BB (Brit. Birds 100: 311) but inevitably some comparisons need to be made here. The earlier title is a larger book so less practical in the field, but contains a longer introduction, more detailed species texts (as well as relatively brief but extremely useful plate captions), many more details of the vagrant records, but lacks distribution maps. Birdwatchers visiting any of these islands should probably take both books and carry the new guide in the field, while keeping the earlier title for reference in the car or hotel.

Rather curiously, the title under review makes almost no reference to Tony Clarke’s field guide. The author is obviously aware of it (since he reviewed it in Ibis) and it seems disingenuous not to include it in the bibliography, nor any mention of Clarke and David Collin’s book A Birdwatchers’ Guide to the Canary Islands (published in 1996 and still in print). Clearly there is more to this than meets the eye!

One final thing drew my attention. The guide includes the recently described Monteiro’s Storm-petrel Oceanodroma monteiroi, a species recently split from Madeiran Storm-petrel O. castro. While the text explains that this is a cryptic species, best separable from Madeiran by voice and perhaps moult timing, I would question the wisdom of using the same illustrations for both species, simply flipped horizontally to try to make them look different.

David Fisher
Antarctic Wildlife is the definitive identification guide to the birds and marine mammals of the Antarctic Peninsula, Drake Passage and Beagle Channel. The introductory chapters are devoted to familiarizing the reader with using the book, the three main environments covered (continental, oceanic and Antarctic), conservation-related activities, and tourism. Subsequent chapters focus on Antarctic wildlife—mammals, birds and plants as well as what to look for and where, timing (the Antarctic season month by month) and tips on identification. Roughly two-thirds of the book, pages 77 through 23 Antarctic Wildlife: A Visitor's Guide should be required for any cruise-based visitor to the great white continent. And if you want to risk being compelled to pay big bucks to go on such a cruise, I'd also recommend it to anyone even slightly interested in the wildlife of Antarctica."--Grant McCready, Birder's Library. "Recommended for either the real-world or armchair traveler interested in the natural history of the Antarctic. . . . Portable and approachable."--Jean E. Crampon, Library Journal. The birds, seals, and whales are grouped (i.e., divided) into three sections (Beagle Channel, Drake Passage, Peninsula). This strategy has its pros and cons. It can be handy for the sea farer to focus on just those species expected in that particular region - assuming there is little or no overlap.