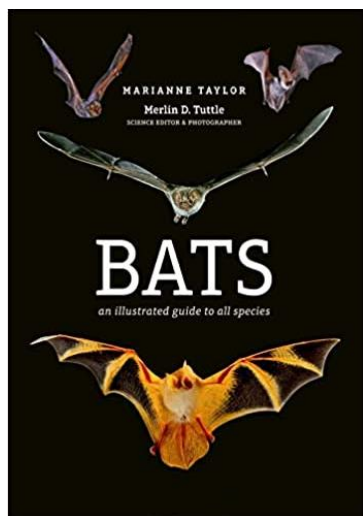


Book review: Bats: an illustrated guide to all species, by Marianne Taylor and Merlin D. Tuttle (Ivy Press)



The first part of this lavishly illustrated book provides an overview of bat evolution, anatomy, adaptations, behaviour, ecology and the relationship between bats and humans. It covers a huge amount of information in a concise and accessible way. The second part, which comprises most of the book, is an overview of all the 1,384 (at the time of going to print!) bat species of the world. There is an overview of each family and genus, with individual profiles of 288 of the better-known species, each accompanied by Merlin Tuttle's stunning photographs. Each species account covers its conservation status, length, weight, distribution, behaviour and other notable facts. Some of the UK species are given less familiar versions of their common names (e.g. "Bechstein's Myotis", "brown big-eared bat") and several UK species are not awarded the full profile treatment, though all species are listed under their genera. However, there

already exist superb books on the bats of the UK and Europe and the key appeal of this book is in illustrating and explaining the global diversity of bat families, genera and species.

This book brilliantly illustrates the diversity of bats. Their powered flight has enabled bats to become such a successful order of mammals, occupying a wide variety of ecological niches and evolving into various weird, wonderful and sometimes beautiful forms. Almost every turn of the page reveals a strikingly distinctive anatomical or behavioural feature, such as different adaptations for directing echolocation calls, with highly contrasting solutions seen in the slit-faced bats and the common sword-nosed bat; remarkable patterns, from the subtle camouflage of the proboscis bat to the beautiful bright orange on black markings of the painted bat; the enlarged ears of species such as our brown long-eared bat, adapted for listening to the movements of insect prey and the echoes from its quiet echolocation calls; and the clever roost construction techniques of the tent-making bat. A review of this book can easily turn into a review of the bats themselves, so vividly does it reveal their wonders!

The book is designed as an overview of the taxonomy and natural history of bats, at which it succeeds brilliantly. Although the information provided will give some clues to the identity of species observed in the field it is clearly not designed to be a field guide, as it does not cover the finer details of species identification and has only occasional mentions of call characteristics. I've seen taxonomic guides to other species groups which have included references to more detailed identification guides and this would have been a useful addition to this book. However, this is a valuable addition to the bat literature and is likely to engage anyone with an interest in wildlife and increase awareness of the importance of bats and their conservation.

Philip Briggs