

## Book reviews

**THE LOST MEN: THE HARROWING SAGA OF SHACKLETON'S ROSS SEA PARTY.** Kelly Tyler-Lewis. New York: Viking; London: Bloomsbury. xvii + 366 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-670-03412-6; 0-7475-6926-6. \$US25.95; £18.99.  
doi:10.1017/S0032247407006572

Some tales of heroism and self-sacrifice take a long time to be told. This is one such story, which has finally been given the treatment it deserves 90 years after the event.

Ernest Shackleton was an ambitious and determined man whose failure to reach the South Pole in 1909 rankled, not least because he believed he was at least the equal of Robert Falcon Scott as a polar explorer. Scott's death on his last expedition had marked him in the public's estimation as both a leader and a martyr, leaving Shackleton deprived of the pole as a goal to ensure his rightful place in history. Since Shackleton had only ever paid lip service to science, this could not be the basis for another expedition, and so it was with enthusiasm that he seized upon the idea of making his mark by being the first to cross the Antarctic continent. Entitling his effort 'The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition,' he set about organising and funding it. Unlike Scott, he was outside the charmed circles of the establishment and so faced enormous battles both to get the endorsement of the Royal Geographical Society and the interest and support of the British government. His problems became much worse once he concluded that the traverse was only possible if the crossing party was supported on the leg from the pole to the Ross Sea by food dumps put in place by a second party working out of Ross Island. This substantially increased the number of men needed and, crucially, required a second ship. So was born the planning for the Ross Sea shore party, a disaster in the making from start to finish.

Kelly Tyler-Lewis has shown remarkable persistence in her search for the details of this story. The tale had already been told in part in Shackleton's *South*, where he devoted five chapters to the party; in *The South Polar trail* by Ernest Joyce (which was anything but dispassionate); and in the rather fragmentary account compiled from his diary by Richard Richards as *The Ross Sea shore party*. Many believed that there was little in the way of other written records available that had not been used, but as Tyler-Lewis followed up leads around the world it became clear that there was a great deal of material to work with, which she has skilfully woven into a gripping narrative.

Of course, what the public and most polar readers remember is the dramatic failure of the crossing party, the

loss of *Endurance* in the ice, the remarkable voyage from Elephant Island to South Georgia in *James Caird*, and the final rescue with not a man lost. Shackleton's account of this in *South* is one of the most gripping polar narratives and overshadows the account there of the travails of the Ross Sea party. Shackleton's reputation as a leader in the field has been increasingly consolidated down the years based on the adventures of the two parties he led personally. What Tyler-Lewis shows us clearly for the first time is that Shackleton signally failed the leadership test for the Ross Sea party, in recruitment, in planning, and most of all in adequately financing the work he expected them to do. Here is a story of corner-cutting, of selecting the wrong people, of bad decisions, and finally of risking the lives of others for the glorious goal he had set for the expedition.

In this carefully researched book we discover that Shackleton paid far too little attention to the details for the Ross Sea. Whilst agreeing that dogs were essential, the quality of dogs purchased was dreadful, and nobody in the shore party had extensive experience driving them. Shackleton was, strangely, far too optimistic in his estimates for depot-laying, allowing only 12 days for bad weather in a period of four months, thus putting the shore party under immense pressure to get the depots into place whatever the conditions. Joseph Stenhouse, who became master of *Aurora*, was only 27 years old, and the leader of the shore party, Æneas Mackintosh, was woefully short of experience. Indeed, as Tyler-Lewis shows, Shackleton's appointments were generally based on expedience and loyalty rather than experience, and his instructions for mooring the *Aurora* were, as John King Davis later remarked, absolutely wrong and would have been over-ridden by a more experienced master.

Three men died, and the remainder were only rescued because of the forced assistance of the governments of Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. Even in this Shackleton's attempts to over-ride the governments who were paying all the bills nearly scuppered the rescue. When he reached New Zealand to join Davis on the relief voyage, Shackleton charmed away much of the bad feeling and was even forgiven by many of the shore party, in due course, for his obvious managerial failings. Alexander Stevens, the geologist, was however not so forgiving about the organisational failings, which had threatened to kill them all.

Tyler-Lewis brings out the personalities of the protagonists very clearly and shows just how the tensions between Mackintosh and Joyce affected decision-making. She provides a very useful epilogue on what happened to

each of the major protagonists after the expedition. Whilst I am sure she was reading between the lines for some of the diaries, she has been careful to provide extensive and detailed documentation in the notes for all of the key events. The annotated notes and bibliography run to 65 pages, and I am certain that even the most expert readers will find previously unknown information within these. This is a very well written and researched volume that makes an important addition to our knowledge of one of the most important expeditions of the Heroic Age. You will enjoy reading it. (David Walton, British Antarctic Survey, High Cross, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB1 0ET.)

### References

- Joyce, E. 1929. *The South Polar trail*. London: Duckworth.  
 Richards, R.W. 1962. *The Ross Sea shore party 1914–17*.  
 Cambridge: Scott Polar Research Institute.  
 Shackleton, E. 1919. *South*. London: William Heinemann.

### A COMPLETE GUIDE TO ARCTIC WILDLIFE.

Richard Sale. 2006. London: Christopher Helm. 464 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-7136-7039-8. £40.00.  
 doi:10.1017/S0032247407006584

Any book that declares itself to be ‘A complete guide to’ any subject or area is asking for pedants to sift through it, to find reasons why that claim cannot be so. Yet Richard Sale does his best to encompass all aspects of Arctic wildlife, even including short sections on regional geology, climate, and humans in his introductory material. The result is a beautifully produced book, printed on high-quality paper that enhances the many superb illustrations. It is perhaps a little heavy to fit in a pocket when used as a field guide, but this must be balanced against the fact that it covers a vast geographical area, and it is ‘complete’ enough to cater to the needs of the average, non-specialist Arctic visitor. In this respect, it is comparable to Hadoram Shirihai’s *The complete guide to Antarctic wildlife*.

The book comprises five sections. The first is an introduction, in which the Arctic is defined, and brief notes are given on the region’s geological structure, snow and ice, glacial landforms, climate, human history and activity, range of habitats available for wildlife, speciation and biogeography, and how various organisms have adapted to life in the cold. The section concludes with an essay entitled ‘The fragile Arctic,’ in which the author highlights various subjects for concern in the region—airborne pollution, the exploitation of minerals and fossil fuels, ozone depletion, over-fishing, whaling, logging, and climate change.

The second section explains how to use the field guide. Rough references are provided (including specified editions), so serious bird enthusiasts can check Sale’s claims for taxonomy and geographical variation. However, these references are given as simply ‘Clements (6th edition)’ and ‘Howard and Moore (3rd edition),’ with no titles,

full author names, or publication details, and there is no reference or reading list. To the casual reader, who is unfamiliar with these tomes and who may wish to consult them, this may prove to be frustrating.

The third and by far the largest section is the ‘Field guide to Arctic birds.’ Most entries are accompanied by excellent photographs, and each section (divers and grebes, geese, raptors, etc) has a colour plate representing each nominate race. The fourth section is the ‘Field guide to Arctic mammals,’ and includes shrews, rodents, lagomorphs, ungulates, carnivores, pinnipeds, and cetaceans. The final and fifth section is entitled ‘A visitor’s guide to the Arctic,’ and provides a very brief description of specific areas—for example, Jan Mayen, Bear Island (Bjørnøya), Russia, and Canada. The information is brief enough to be unhelpful, and a list of further reading would not have gone amiss. There is a three-page index, which is short for a book in excess of 460 pages, and the reader can look up ‘walrus’ but not ‘hooded seal’ (which is under ‘seal’).

Each entry begins with a description of pelage or plumage (‘identification’), a list of species with which the animal may be confused (‘confusion species’), body size, ‘voice’ (birds) or ‘communication’ (mammals), distribution (illustrated with a small map for easy reference), diet, breeding habits, and taxonomy and geographical variation. There are a few annoyances. First, all the distribution maps include a blank-white part, indicating ‘areas of permanently frozen sea’ (see page 54). In the section on marine mammals, this implies these animals are never found in leads, polynias, or in the pack ice at all, which is misleading. Secondly, the bird section uses orange shading to illustrate distribution, but some orange is two-tone (see, for example, the entry for the short-eared owl on pages 285–286, where Alaska and parts of Norway are lighter). Is this deliberate, or an eccentricity of printing? The same is true in the chapter on marine mammals, where two shades of pink are used (see, for example, the entry for the bearded seal on page 421). And the cetacean chapter does not have a diagram showing comparative fin shapes, blows, and other characters traditionally used for identifying whales at a distance. As anyone who has engaged in whale-watching will know, these animals rarely oblige with a complete showing of themselves, so knowing that fin whales have a pale ventral area is not always a practical diagnostic tool. This omission reduces the book’s usefulness as a field guide for whales.

Finally, there are one or two small errors of fact. For example, the lowest temperature ever recorded in the Antarctic was  $-89.6^{\circ}\text{C}$  (Clarkson 2006), not  $-88^{\circ}\text{C}$  as stated on page 19, and katabatic winds are not restricted to the polar regions, as stated on page 20. Nevertheless, Sale should be commended for his work, and *A complete guide to Arctic wildlife* will be a welcome edition to the bookshelves of any collector of polar books. (Liz Cruwys, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)