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**Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest**  
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## Reviews — Revues

**The Birds of Africa, vol. 5.** Ed. by E.K. Urban, C.H. Fry & S. Keith, 1997. 669 pp., 32 col. plates. Academic Press, London. ISBN 0-12-137305-3. £99.

This volume covers those thrushes not already dealt with, all warblers, including cisticolas, and the various species loosely called flycatchers: not many families but amounting to an extremely heavy tome. A major improvement in this volume is that breeding ranges are shown in red on the maps.

Naturally, anyone seriously interested in African birds should own this book. Regional guides continue to proliferate and are essential for short trips, but only when all species of a genus are gathered together can one see the full picture. Take the cisticolas, that most challenging of genera to the newcomer to Africa; 43 species are described here and more are being discovered all the time. Among others, two Tanzanian species are still officially undescribed and not mentioned here (one wonders why — they have been known for over ten years, have English names and are easy to find and identify by sight and voice in their flood-plain environment). Much classification recently has turned on acoustics: *Cisticola dorsti* of N Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad is known only from breeding males, when they sing and can be distinguished from *C. ruficeps*; females and non-breeders are undescribed. Similarly, *Prinia fluviatilis* would be dismissed as *P. subflava* were it not for its voice and, as is now known, its waterside habitat.

In taxonomy, *Birds of Africa* generally belongs to the lumping school, with occasional innovative exceptions: interesting examples here are *Hyliota usambarae* split from *H. australis* and *Cisticola cinnamomeus* from *C. brunnescens*. Much depends on an author's whim. Several forms once afforded species rank might justifiably be resurrected, e.g. the Cameroon montane *Cisticola discolor* split from E African *C. chubbi* and *C. emini* from southern *C. aberrans* (where they approach in Tanzania, each is instantly recognizable by voice). The wattle-eye *Diaphorophya blissetti* is often split into three, with the wholly black-headed *chalybaea* intervening between two red-cheeked forms. Incidentally, why change the old name of "Blissett's" Wattle-eye to "Red-cheeked" when you include a form without red cheeks?

Martin Woodcock's plates are always justly praised and most of these abundantly live up to his meticulous standards with, for example, admirable depictions of the look-alike *Acrocephalus* spp. and a splendid series of races of the *Turdus olivaceus/pelios* complex. But I fear that something has gone wrong with the cisticolas. I don't think he had enough guidance from the authors, and at times the jizz has eluded him. When recently I saw *C. angusticauda* for the first time, with one glance at the plate in *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* (Zimmerman, D.A., Turner, D.A. & Pearson, D.J. 1996, Helm, London) I exclaimed "That's it!"; I could

not have done that with *Birds of Africa*. *C. dorsti* differs morphologically from *C. ruficeps* virtually only on the under tail-coverts and tail; should not the authors have insisted on a plate showing the underside of the species?

Lastly a local grumble: although *The Conservation of the Birds of Gola Forest, Sierra Leone* (Allport, G., Ausden, M., Hayman, P.V., Robertson, P. & Wood, P. 1989, ICBP, Cambridge) is mentioned in the bibliography, curiously little account of it has been taken. *Hyliota violacea*, *Muscicapa olivascens*, *M. epulata* and *Myioparus griseigularis* are all documented there (as I can corroborate myself) yet all are ignored here. These omissions could be important: ornithologists are unlikely to be able to visit eastern Sierra Leone in the foreseeable future and by then the Gola Forest may have ceased to exist.

The enormous value of this work is incontrovertible and, if I have mentioned certain weaknesses, this is because the better the book, the higher the standards by which it should be judged.

G.D. Field

**Etude Initiale. La Réserve Naturelle Nationale de l'Air et du Ténééré (Niger).** Ed. by F. Giazzi, 1996. 678 pp., 52 plates, numerous figures and tables. IUCN, Gland. ISBN 2-8317-0249-6. Paperback, £17.50.

This new, comprehensive study, of a recently-established (1988) reserve, comes nearly 50 years after a volume in the famous IFAN series (1950, Contribution à l'étude de l'Air. *Mém. Inst. fr. Afr. noire* 10), which covered much the same area but with a rather different emphasis. The IFAN studies had a more biological and anthropological focus, whereas this new work aims to study the effect of man on the environment and assist in the formulation of a management plan. The chapters of the present book include studies of rainfall, hydrology, aquifers, geomorphology, erosion processes, vegetation, animals, archaeology, human history, anthropology, human population, economic activities, tourism, and the institutional and legal bases for conservation.

The book contains a wealth of fascinating detail. The rainfall studies clarify the relatively wet period in the Sahel from 1920 to 1965, before and after which the climate was drier, at least up to 1990, which seems to be the cut-off date for most of the studies included in the volume. The research, as well as development of the reserve, was curtailed by political unrest shortly thereafter. The vegetation chapters (by Pierre Poilecot) include a thorough biogeographic analysis, discussing the various habitat types and vegetation zones with their characteristic species, endemics and geographic affinities. There is an excellent set of floristic appendices.