



**West African Ornithological Society**  
**Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest**  
**Africain**



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are generally well written and uniform in style, with a relatively small number of authors having contributed to this volume.

The plates are mostly up to the usual high standard of HBW, although the colours are occasionally rather washed out, e.g. Plate 7, where the Green Barbet *Stactolaema olivacea* is not green enough and the Yellow-throated Tinker *Pogoniulus s. subsulphureus* is depicted with just a trace of cream on the throat and supercilium instead of the intense yellow it shows in life. It is sometimes a little difficult to assign the birds on a plate to the correct species, as usually only one reference number is given for each species: where there are many subspecies, these can sometimes appear closer to the wrong species' number. Either the numbers need to be better placed or the subspecies better grouped, or dividing lines added.

Anyway, these are comparatively minor points, and as has become usual in reviews of HBW, I end by congratulating once again the authors, photographers, artists and editors on a wonderful achievement.

Alan Tye

**Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa**, by T. Stevenson & J. Fanshawe, 2002. 602 pp. including 570 col. plates, many maps. T. & A.D. Poyser, London. ISBN 0-85661-079-8, hardback, £29.95.

Two important African regional guides have appeared so far this year. One, *Birds of Western Africa* (by Borrow & Demey, Christopher Helm, London), was reviewed in the last issue of *Malimbus* (24: 45–47). This, the other, might at first sight appear out of the geographical area of interest of this journal but, in addition to Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, the book also includes Rwanda and Burundi, which we include in our Society's range. It also includes a surprisingly high proportion of what are normally considered strictly W African birds, owing to the fact that many of the latter extend just into E Africa in Uganda, especially in the Semliki Valley.

There are many differences between the two books mentioned. The price of the present work is 55% that of Borrow & Demey and, with 25% fewer pages than Borrow & Demey's 832, and a smaller, typical field-guide page size, this book weighs about half the W African guide, despite the fact that it includes 1388 species, 80% of all the birds that occur in sub-Saharan Africa, and over 100 species more than Borrow & Demey. It will thus be much more handy for field use. The high-quality glossy paper is similar in both books, and space and weight have here been saved in several other ways. First, the introductory sections are reduced to a minimum (14 pages). Second not all subspecies are described and relatively few are illustrated; instead, the text (and to a lesser extent the plates) discusses all races considered "important or distinctive". This is probably acceptable for a field guide, since full

taxonomic treatment can be found in other works. Third, the species texts focus on field identification, with no detailed plumage descriptions, although there are short sections on “habits” (including habitat, range, status and breeding) and voice. A further difference is that this book follows the now-standard and convenient field guide style of text opposite plate, with mostly 3–5 species per page.

There is a distinct Kenya bias, reflecting the experience of the authors as well as data availability. But sometimes this is more serious, for instance where a restricted-range Kenyan race is depicted rather than a more widespread Tanzanian one.

I was surprised by the variable and often poor quality of the type. Some pages are very poor indeed, with the type so shadowed as to make one feel as if seeing double. I hope this is a fault restricted to the copy reviewed, and luckily it appears to affect only the type and not the plates. A small irritation is that Family names are not included on the text or plate pages. The English names used are sometimes those in commonest use (e.g. “spurfowl” is maintained for three species of *Francolinus*) — but sometimes pedantic and over-standardized (e.g. lapwing for all *Vanellus* — who really uses “Blacksmith Lapwing”?). Unfortunately, the American style of unnecessary hyphenation is adopted (e.g. Green-Pigeon).

Despite the fact that three artists (Brian Small, John Gale, Norman Arlott) contribute to the plates, the style is quite uniform, and in the main very clear and useful, although there seems to have been some trouble depicting iridescence (e.g. pigeons and cuckoos) and occasionally proportions (e.g. green pigeons *Treron*). Lines are sometimes used to divide species where necessary on a crowded plate but they could have been used more; in a few cases, such as swallows and helmet-shrikes, it can be quite confusing trying to work out which bird goes with which name. The text-plus-plate is usually adequate for identification, with a very few exceptions where one is left baffled as to distinctions (e.g. white-eyes *Zosterops*).

Each species has a small map accompanying its text, usually quite generalized and with little attempt made to show detailed distribution; for that, one is referred to country atlases, already published for Kenya and Uganda. This is unfortunate for some species, especially montane endemics, which are shown with much broader ranges than they really have. Individual Eastern Arc blocks are sometimes forgotten (e.g. Usambara Weaver *Ploceus nicolli* is not shown in the Udzungwas). Perhaps the oddest manifestation of this is under Loveridge’s Sunbird *Cinnyris loveridgei*, where the text claims that “race” *moreaui* is probably a hybrid between *loveridgei* and Eastern Double-collared Sunbird *C. mediocris*, but then the areas where *moreaui* occurs (as acknowledged in the text) are not mapped as part of the range of either *mediocris* or *loveridgei*. Perhaps another indication of Kenya bias is that Zanzibar and Pemba islands are missed off almost all of the range maps, and are hardly ever mentioned in the species texts.

However, many of the above are minor criticisms in that they affect relatively few species, and the authors and editor have produced a generally excellent book, more comprehensive than competitors, permitting it to occupy a niche in the relatively

crowded East African field guide community. The shortcomings mentioned could perhaps be put right in a second edition, but the saddest news is that the monstrous Elsevier has swallowed up Academic Press and its bird imprint Poyser, and has decided to suppress the latter and no longer publish bird books. Since some of the best bird guides and monographs to appear in recent years have come out under this imprint, this loss is serious. Poyser's high standards, as maintained in this book, are and will be hard to match.

Alan Tye

**Important Bird Areas in Africa and Associated Islands**, ed. by L.D.C. Fishpool & M.I. Evans, 2001. 1144 + xvi pp. Birdlife International, Cambridge. ISBN 1-874357-20-X, hardback, £55.

There are 1228 IBAs in Africa and its islands (including the central and S Atlantic, and W and S Indian Ocean) that are presented in this book, of which only 343 (28%) fall within the 40% of Africa defined by WAOS's area of coverage. The density of IBAs is higher in E Africa, Ethiopia and Madagascar, with very few in the Sahara, Sahel and especially in the Congo basin, regions that make up about half of WAOS's area of coverage. Whether this represents a true situation or lack of knowledge is not clear. I would guess that for the Sahara and Sahel it is indeed a true picture, but that other parts of W Africa are under-represented due to lack of information.

The Introduction to the book starts with a question: why bother with birds? The answer, referring to the "intricate linkages between all components of the Earth we live in" sums up Birdlife's conservation philosophy, that conserving birds helps lead to a sustainable future for all life on earth: birds are conspicuous and well-known indicators of biodiversity. The main objective of this book is to identify the most important sites for bird conservation, using a standard methodology, as a tool for planning and management. The methods for site selection are outlined, with criteria including: holds significant numbers of a threatened species; is a significant part of an Endemic Bird Area (as defined by A.J. Stattersfield *et al.* 1998. *Endemic Bird Areas of The World*. Birdlife, Cambridge); contains a significant component of a group of species more or less confined to the biome of the site; supports  $\geq 1\%$  of a biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird or of the global population of a congregatory seabird or a terrestrial species; supports  $\geq 20,000$  waterbirds or  $\geq 10,000$  pairs of seabirds. The major biomes in W Africa are Sahara, Sahel, Sudan-Guinea savanna, Guinea-Congo forests and Afrotropical highlands. Photographs of some of these are included.

The remainder of the Introduction explains how to use the book and presents pan-African summaries. Almost half of all African IBAs are unprotected by law and many