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an epiphytic fern *Asplenium* on a tree-trunk, 1.7 m above the ground (Dhondt 1976). Like the Brown Nightjar, the Collared Nightjar is a little-known species of the rainforest interior with large eyes and ridged eyebrows and whose nestlings have not been documented. Anomalously, its eggs are unmarked white, and it possesses a "facial disc", similar to that of a Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and which, I believe, does not occur in any other member of the genus.

### References

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## Book Reviews

**The Vultures of Africa.** By P. Mundy, D. Butchart, J. Ledger & S. Piper, 1992. 464 pp., numerous line drawings and colour plates. Acorn Books, Randburg / Russel Friedman Books, Halfway House. ISBN 1-874802-03-3. US\$60, hardback.

This is a labour of love by four vulture experts, as expressively declared in a preface and acknowledgments. It is not, however, intended primarily for other vulture experts (if it were, sales would be small!) but is a good read for any interested naturalist. The style is easy and conversational; discussions start from first principles (e.g. a page on how evolution works) but progress to include the latest research results (to early 1992!) and the most arcane facts. Thus everyone, from layman to expert, will find interest in it. There is also much stimulating speculation in areas where knowledge is lacking, such as the function of the bare "eyes" beside the crop in griffons. The residences of the authors and, to some extent, availability of data, give the book a southern African emphasis, but the authors have tried to be as pan-African as possible, and there is a lot of West African information within. What few errors I spotted were not southern African, for example Djoudj National Park is said to be part of the Saloum area, and the Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* is not shown as present in Liberia nor "in the forest zone between Freetown and Ghana" (perpetuating the error of *The Birds of Africa*).

Two points of design attract comment. First, there are no references in the text and, forewarned, I thought that I would find this concession to "readability" irritating. In fact, it improves the style and should not create great problems for those wishing to pursue points further, because a full bibliography is given at the end, cross-referenced by chapter and species; I liked the idea. Second, all the tables are collected at the back, although the figures accompany the text. This idiosyncratic arrangement I found inconvenient and it led to my simply ignoring most of the tables. This was perhaps a concession to non-scientists, but surely not a necessary one.

The title is modest, in that the first chapter is a global survey of species and speciation (including American vultures), which sets out some original views. The other comparative chapters are similarly not restricted to African species.

Individual accounts of the 11 African species, each accompanied by a nice painting by Butchart in somewhat 19th-century style (intended as a compliment), take up 161 pages. Each starts with an interesting tale of the species' discovery and naming, followed by a description and biological account. This was the only major section of the book which I skimmed, rather than reading from beginning to end; inevitably, as a collection of facts about individual species, it makes relatively dry reading but the facts are valuable and will be indispensable to vulture enthusiasts. Getting towards the end of this section, I realised that I had still only reached the middle of the book. The remaining half is packed with photographs, accompanying more comparative chapters, attractively and penetratingly analytical in style and wide in scope. One on foraging, feeding and socializing discusses guilds, food location, competition between species and with non-vultures, bill morphology, sequence of events at carcasses, types and sources of food, food webs, an analysis of the Serengeti ecosystem and gathering places. There are chapters on the role of vultures in African cultures (San, Egyptian, SE African Bantu), modern attitudes, threats and the Vulture Study Group. This last was the only one I did not like; it is entirely southern African in context, with nauseatingly endless lists of the authors' friends. These minutiae are not really of great interest to anyone other than the characters involved and the chapter could have been much shorter. This aside, I found the book an excellent read and I thoroughly recommend it.

Alan Tye

**The Birds of Africa**, Vol. 4. Ed. by S. Keith, E.K. Urban & C.H. Fry, 1992. 609pp., 32 colour plates. Academic Press, London. ISBN 0-12-137304-5. £72.

At last this monumental work reaches the passerines. Originally planned for four volumes, *Birds of Africa* has expanded with each issue. The average length of a species account is now 1000 words and there will be three more volumes before the task is completed. This one covers broadbills, pittas, larks, swallows, pipits, wagtails, cuckoo-shrikes, bulbuls and the smaller thrushes, but for reasons of space true thrushes *Turdus* and their allies are held over until Volume 5.