



West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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Reviews — Revues

Handbook of the Birds of the World, vol. 6, Mousebirds to Hornbills, J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott & J. Sargatal (eds), 2001. 589 pp., 44 col. plates, numerous maps and photos. Lynx, Barcelona. ISBN 84-87334-30X, hardback, £110. Available from Lynx Edicions, Passeig de Gràcia 12, 08007 Barcelona, Spain (lynx@hbw.com).

As is becoming customary, this volume of HBW begins with an unexpected bonus: a fascinating 40-page essay (including 11 pages of references) on avian bioacoustics by L.F. Baptista and D.E. Kroodsma. Despite this opening interest, a Voice section is still not included in all species accounts, although there is a promise in the Introduction to include such a section for an increasing number of families in future. As in previous volumes, voice information is discussed in comparative fashion in the lengthy introductory sections for each family. Users of HBW have grown accustomed to this treatment, which makes good reading and gives a good general picture of the family and its members, but does not readily permit tracing of information to its source, as references are not interspersed with the text. I would personally find the family sections much more useful if they were to be referenced: it is frustrating to see specific studies quoted but to be unable to identify the source. As usual, the family sections are illustrated with extraordinarily high quality photographs, which are selected to illustrate as many points of the biology of as many species as possible. In the present volume, the photography stands out due to the superb plumages of many of its subjects, the Coliiformes, Trogoniformes and Coraciiformes.

The book's main value is thus a combination of quick reference to some species-specific information (in the species accounts) and an excellent review of the biology of bird families. One of its main advantages is the comparative treatment of species within families. The main disadvantage is that one still needs to refer to regional references, such as *Birds of Africa* (Academic Press, London) or family monographs, in order to get a comprehensive account, and lead into the literature, on individual species.

The comparative treatment within the family sections seems to work best for smaller families, as the editors have tried to ensure that within the family section every species gets a mention under most of the points discussed (systematics, morphology, habitat, habits, voice, food and feeding, breeding, movements, relationship with man, status and conservation). In small families, the comparative approach (and the interest of the reader) does not get swamped, but for large families, this inclusivity and completeness result in what can become a somewhat tedious series of paragraphs, dealing with the same points in species after species. Some authors have managed this better than others, but perhaps some of this kind of detail should be transferred to the individual species accounts, leaving the family sections

more strictly comparative. This could be more important in future volumes dealing with larger families; the present volume includes 12 families, many of them small. The longest family sections are for kingfishers (57 pp.) and hornbills (50 pp.), with the individual species accounts in addition to this.

As usual in a work of this nature, every specialist will spot detailed errors. Mine included mistakes in the range description for *Halcyon malimbica* in the Gulf of Guinea (even though the reference putting the historical mistake right is quoted in the account), and mixed-up names in the photo captions on p. 456. But the frequency of such errors is minimal, and scarcely detracts from the enormous pleasure of reading this book. As usual, authors, photographers, artists and editors all deserve congratulations for it.

Alan Tye

Birds of Western Africa, N. Borrow & R. Demey, 2002. 832 pp., 147 col. plates, many maps. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 0-7136-3959-8, hardback, £55.

W Africa as defined in this book almost coincides with the W Africa of *Malimbus*'s coverage, except that the book excludes the Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa) and eastward. The Gulf of Guinea and Cape Verde groups are the only oceanic islands included. All 1285 species and most subspecies known or suspected to occur in this region are described, and nearly all illustrated. Maps are given for more than 1100 species.

Short introductory sections, totalling less than 30 pages, precede the plates, each with a facing page of brief captions, and then come the species texts with maps accompanying the texts. The introductory sections include geographical coverage, nomenclature, explanation of the layout and content of the species accounts and maps, climate, topography, habitats, conservation issues, glossary and abbreviations. The species texts include vernacular names in English and French, detailed descriptions, voice (giving where possible the CD and track number of Chappuis, C. 2000, *African Bird Sounds*, Société d'Etudes Ornithologiques de France, Paris), habits, similar species, status, distribution and taxonomic uncertainties, but not breeding. Among the text section are a few line drawings to illustrate identification features such as egret head shapes and weaver nests.

The book does not have plate opposite species text, impossible given the length of the texts in this work. The advantage of the former layout has been sacrificed for more textual information. The species texts are mainly good, but the maps are sometimes inaccurate in detail. As examples, the northern distribution limit depicted for many forest species in Sierra Leone omits their extension to the Freetown