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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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Statistics for Ornithologists. By J. Fowler & L. Cohen, undated (1995). Pp. 150. BTO Guide 22, British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford. No ISBN number given, paperback, £11.90 (+£1 postage within U.K., £2 overseas) from BTO, Thetford IP24 2PU, U.K.

The second edition of this practical guide has been revised in the light of comments received and the authors' experience of what ornithologists (mainly ringers) require. All of the procedures described (up to 2-way ANOVA with equal sample sizes) can be done using a scientific calculator; computer procedures are not included. The authors acknowledge that much of the material is taken from their work *Practical Statistics for Field Biology* (1990, Wiley) and this is revealed in some slips, such as the graph of robin wing length on p.42, captioned "Probability distribution of leaf length...".

The introduction to what statistics are is sound, and reassuringly brief for a beginner, although there is some confusion on p.11 with the definitions of "sample unit", "sampling unit" (the same, but a beginner might think they were different) and of observation and variable (not the same, but "observation" is used in one place where "variable" is meant). Chapters 3–4 on how to arrange data are similarly clear, brief and concise but, because of their brevity, need careful, slow reading in order to grasp all the concepts discussed. Chapters 5 and 6 on central tendency and variability take a little more concentration, especially the description of the median for frequency distributions.

Unfortunately for a second edition, there are many mistakes of the kind mentioned above, some trivial (e.g. -1 , -2 on Fig 7.4 instead of $+1$, $+2$, and on p.120 a result is "significantly significant"!), some seriously misleading (e.g. a probability distribution is called a frequency distribution near the foot of p.41, and on p.51 it is stated that $\log 1$ is impossible whereas what is meant is that $\log 0$ is impossible). These really should have been spotted during a thorough proof-read.

On the other hand, many of the explanations are excellent in their clarity — the book contains the most comprehensible account of the relation of t to z and the normal distribution, and of the relationship between standard deviation and standard error, that I have seen anywhere. The section on testing nicely illustrates parametric and non-parametric tests, usually with one of each in the same chapter. Some descriptions could have been clearer, e.g. in the introduction to testing (Ch. 10), the first few pages mix up discussion of two sets of hypotheses (that two populations of starling differ in weight and that they differ in behaviour), which would make it confusing for a beginner trying to sort out the procedures. Use of Model 2 regression is also not explained especially well.

In general, this is probably the clearest introduction to statistics that I have seen (despite the above criticisms, it has to be said that most stats books are far more difficult); it should be obtained by anyone who needs statistics but is frightened of them or muddled about their use. One general improvement would have been a

summary table showing which tests to use for which kinds of data; if this could be included in a reprint, and all those irritating little errors corrected, I would give it an unqualified recommendation.

Alan Tye

Pittas, Broadbills and Asities. By F. Lambert & M. Woodcock, 1996. 271 pp., 24 col. plates, numerous maps and line drawings. Pica Press, Mountfield. ISBN 1-873403-24-0, hardback, £26.

Of the 32 pittas, 15 broadbills and four asities, only two pittas and four broadbills occur in West Africa. This is largely a S.E. Asian group of birds with its present centre of diversity in the Sundas, but the relationships of the outlying species are intriguing and current theories are discussed at length.

The layout and content of this book are like those of other Pica volumes (see review, *Malimbus* 18: 64-65) with much identification information, but this one also has more than the usual amount of biology. It is also bang up to date, with lots of recent, unpublished information obtained from a wide circle of correspondents and colleagues. There is here everything you could want to know about these birds — as far as it is known, that is; this is a true, scholarly monograph. For African species, there is much more detail than found in *The Birds of Africa* (Keith *et al.* 1992, Academic Press, London), with ranges mapped more precisely. However, there are some errors; for example, the map for Grey-headed Broadbill *Smithornis sharpei* has the West Cameroonian range shifted into Nigeria. The maps really should have included country boundaries for ease of reference: these are much better known than the major rivers which are the only other point of reference shown on the maps, and showing boundaries would probably have avoided the errors mentioned above.

I found the plates rather disappointing and not up to Woodcock's usual standard, although they are adequate for identification purposes. They are more artificial-looking than alive, and the ones of pittas rather dull for such a strikingly bright group of birds.

But these complaints are comparatively minor; overall this is a fine monograph in the best tradition. As always with such books, I doubt that sufficient people really need it (as opposed to people who don't but who will buy any bird book), to create the market to permit publication; but if a market exists, for whatever reason, so much the better, for such works are of great value to the few specialists who do really need them and would not otherwise get them.

Alan Tye