



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



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My other general observation, rather than criticism, is that the book reveals how, in many ways, ecological botany is some way behind zoology. Analysis of rainforest structure is still largely descriptive: why the structure is as it is, and why regional differences exist, are questions that are still not fully addressed. There is, in general, not enough attempt at explanation in ecological-evolutionary terms, and much more credence is given to the notion that a characteristic may have no functional explanation than would be the case in zoology. Features of tropical rainforest, such as the thinness of tree bark, are often described, without comment as to why they should be so characteristic of the system, although there are exceptions: the functions of buttresses and stilt roots, and the uniformity of leaf shape and rarity of wind-pollinated flowers are extensively discussed. However, zoologists are lucky in dealing with systems that are easier to investigate: tropical forest botany treats with organisms whose lifespan is measured in centuries.

Despite the above criticisms, I would have absolutely no hesitation in recommending this new book to anyone who wants to understand rainforest biology; it is an excellent review of its field. And in the impoverished present and future world, it will, as the publisher claims, "stand as a record of what the rainforest was like in the twentieth century": a sad, but all too accurate, recommendation for this masterly work.

Alan Tye

**Las Aves de Bioko, Guinea Ecuatorial.** By J. Pérez del Val. 1996. 240 pp., incl. 25 col. plates, numerous maps. Edilesa. León. ISBN 84-8012-145-9 paperback. No price given.

This book is especially surprising as it is the first complete field guide for any West African country, or substantial part of a country, and that country is currently one of the least-visited by ornithologists. Besides that, it is entirely in Spanish: appropriate for use within the country, but I hope that an English translation will appear soon, for this would considerably increase its readership. It has no competitor, and is useful for West Africa outside Bioko, as it deals with many widespread species. Its nearest rival is *A Field Guide to the Birds of West Africa* (Serle & Morel 1975, Collins, London), but the new book is far better for the species which it includes: the descriptions are at least as good and the plates are mostly better.

There are useful introductory sections on history, geography, biology, and the history of ornithological exploration of the former Fernando Po. The intense interest in the island during the pre-colonial and colonial periods resulted in a comparatively high level of ornithological work at that time, but the country's unfortunate post-colonial turmoil prevented a continuation of these studies, until very recently. The author has spent several years on the island, along with a number of Spanish collaborators. The book is more than a field guide and serves also as an authoritative

checklist. It based on a thorough analysis of historical records, supplemented by these recent observations, and it aims to include every species that has been reliably reported from the island, up to May 1996.

The species texts give Spanish, Bubi and scientific names (with English and French names on the plates), identification details (including comparison with similar species), and distribution. For resident and some migrant species, details are also given of population and habitat in Bioko. These sections reveal some interesting biogeography: e.g. many wader species that are common in the more southerly islands of São Tomé and Príncipe appear relatively rarely in Bioko.

The biggest mistake is the omission of any description of vocalizations. There is not a word, not even for such species as *Chrysococcyx* cuckoos or owls, species which are much more frequently encountered by voice rather than sight, and not even when the species text acknowledges this. And there is no discussion of the fact that a large proportion of the local names of the birds are onomatopoeic. Other minor slips occur — Nigel Collar might be pleased with one: the Collared Sunbird *Anthreptes collaris* is given the Spanish name Suimanga de Collar!

The plates are of variable quality: although some are good, others rather let the book down. Some birds, including the hawks, are oddly shaped and some depictions are actually misleading — e.g. the Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* and some other waders and flycatchers could scarcely be identified from their pictures, while the Lemon Dove *Aplopelia larvata* is shown as bright purplish blue!

Despite these criticisms, the book is certainly welcome, and I would definitely recommend its purchase by any West African ornithologist able to read Spanish.

Alan Tye

**Birds of Eastern Africa.** By B. van Perlo. 1995. 310 pp., numerous maps and colour plates. Harper Collins, London. ISBN 0-00-219937-8, paperback, £14.99.

This book illustrates in colour all species known from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Socotra, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. It has already been widely reviewed from an East African point of view, but what makes the book interesting to readers of *Malimbus* is that it illustrates most of the species that occur in the sahelian countries of West Africa. For instance, all but 40 of the 523 species reported from Niger are depicted. As far as I know, no other single field guide matches this.

The plates are quite crowded with often smallish paintings, mostly of good or acceptable quality. On the facing pages are descriptions, of 1–3 lines, of the species, habitats or voice. Distribution maps are grouped at the back.

It is a pity that there is no French version of this book, but I will take it with me when next I go anywhere in West Africa.

Joost Brouwer