



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



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Book Reviews

Cormorants, Darters, and Pelicans of the World. By P.A. Johnsgard, 1993. xiv + 445 pp. + 31 pp. of colour plates. Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. ISBN 1-56098-216-0. Hardback £38.25.

This partial monograph of the Pelecaniformes excludes the other families which have never been so treated to date (Fregatidae and Phaethontidae), because it would have been too much work to include them and comparatively little is known about them. So states the author in his preface; still, it's a shame. Johnsgard monographs appear regularly, and this one follows the established format. There is a series of comparative introductory chapters, followed by a section on each species. As always, Johnsgard makes no claim to expert knowledge of the group he is monographing, and the book is simply a review of current knowledge.

The systematic treatment thoroughly reviews published opinions, and chooses safe compromises. This results in only one oddity: the classification of all the New Zealand blue-eyed shags as different species, resulting in comparatively too much coverage. The other introductory chapters cover comparative morphology, maintenance and locomotory behaviour, foraging behaviour (including fascinating summaries of pelican plunge-diving and fishing with domesticated cormorants), social behaviour, breeding, population dynamics and conservation (although few species are endangered, this section contains some important lessons). These chapters are all comprehensively researched; they make rather dry reading but are invaluable as leads into the research literature. Many sections contain useful comparative tables, e.g. of breeding productivity. But in this part of the book, the margins occupy more than one-quarter of the page; who wants to pay for that?

The rest (252 pp.) comprises the species accounts. To assess their usefulness, I compared the West African species accounts (two cormorants, one darter, two pelicans) with those in Volume 1 of *The Birds of Africa* (Brown *et al.* 1982, Academic Press, London). Generally, the plumage descriptions are more detailed than in *BoA*, especially of young stages. There are more measurements and weights, but fewer egg measurements. Details for identification in the hand are given, with keys in an appendix; these might be useful for researchers on this group, who are among the few individuals likely to buy it. The illustrations (photos plus line drawings) are less useful than the portraits in *BoA*, at least for identification. There is more detail on habitat, food, social behaviour and breeding for most species, although not substantially for the pelicans. Items of information are much better referenced than in *BoA*, and the style is more conversational. All these points are what might be expected for a monograph, and result in the conclusion that those interested in these groups (particularly worldwide) will certainly value the book, but the majority of ornithologists will be content without it.

One point where I think *BoA* wins is the maps. Johnsgard's attempt to show more detail (usefully, showing major breeding colonies) but could have been better designed to do so. There are some errors (e.g. dots to indicate colony sizes omitted, although captions say they should be there). The mapped distributions often differ from those in *BoA*, and I think that *BoA* is usually more correct, particularly as in some cases Johnsgard's range descriptions agree with *BoA* maps, rather than with his own; as an extreme example, Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* is shown breeding on the Seychelles but not so listed in the text. Some maps are definitely wrong, e.g. most of Africa is shown as "non-breeding" range of the Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*, whereas it is actually probably resident in much of this range, but breeding is simply not proven. Others omit some documented records which are mentioned in *BoA*.

Apart from the maps, I spotted few errors: a few mis-spellings only. Johnsgard has fulfilled the task he set himself in his usual thorough fashion.

Alan Tye



Darter - Anhinga d'Afrique - *Anhinga melanogaster*

Photo: Michael Gore

The Birds of CITES and How to Identify Them. By J. Erritzøe, 1993. xxii + 199 pp., 10 monochrome + 75 colour plates. Lutterworth Press, Cambridge. ISBN 0-7188-2894-1, £30 (hardback); ISBN 0-7188-2892-5, £26 (ringbound); ISBN 0-7188-2895-X, £95 (leatherbound).

Restrictions on trade imposed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora (CITES) cover 1478 bird species, the basis for this book. Species which are, or are likely to become, endangered, are illustrated in colour. A further 1072 "lookalike" species included in the CITES listings are illustrated in black and white. CITES Appendix III comprises species