



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



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which any party to the Convention has made subject to jurisdiction and in need of cooperation from other parties for the purposes of controlling trade; hence about 130 Ghanaian species are included in colour. This is not so interesting for the West African ornithologist as it may seem, as some of these are local races of species common worldwide, such as Green Fruit Pigeon, Village Weaver and Cattle Egret, although the implications of having to restrict trade in even common species merit consideration.

The title's claim to be an identification guide is over-ambitious, given the brief plumage descriptions, poor colours in many plates, lack of comparison with similar species for families not included in the lookalike list and scant referencing of regional handbooks and family monographs. It is doubtful whether the book will be useful on its own as an identification guide but, if misidentification leads to non-CITES species being erroneously included, this cannot be a bad thing for the birds. The availability of a leatherbound edition suggests it is aimed partly at the collectors' market. However, any attention to the problems caused to wildlife by the bird trade is welcome, and the support by WWF and Prince Philip in launching this book, together with its generally attractive appearance, should contribute to raising public awareness of CITES.

Hilary Tye

Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 1. Ostrich to ducks. Ed. by J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott & J. Sargatal, 1992. 696 pp., 50 colour paintings, numerous photos. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. ISBN 84-87334-10-5. Hardback c. £95.

The obvious course to take, when reviewing this book from a West African perspective, is to compare it with *The Birds of Africa* (Brown *et al.* 1982, Urban *et al.* 1986, Fry *et al.* 1988, Keith *et al.* 1992, Academic Press, London) (henceforth *BoA*). However, the two works have very different aims and approaches. The present book (henceforth *HBW*) does not attempt to usurp regional works, and the Family is the basic unit for the biological accounts. The family sections include systematics and evolution, morphology, habitat, habits, voice, food and feeding, breeding, movements, relations with man, status and conservation, with the emphasis on systematics, status and conservation. Family sections are profusely illustrated by photographs, which are excellent, many illustrating actions; from one photo of ostriches running, one can see exactly how the legs move.

Following the family account, each species has a concise text and a plate. The artists have done some brilliant work, especially Lluís Centelles and Francesc Jutglar. They deserve lots more commissions. All species are illustrated, as are many subspecies and both sexes if sufficiently different, but the book is not an identification guide and only breeding plumage is shown. Measurement sections are

very brief and not of great intraspecific use. Every species has a small map, not normally depicting less than a continent, even if the bird's distribution is very limited. Perhaps the biggest mistake is to include voice in the family, not species accounts. The Introduction admits that such generalizations are of little use, whereas voice can be a key to specific identification.

Does the family vs species approach otherwise succeed? Accounts for monospecific families (e.g. ostrich) contain much of the detail which would go into species accounts in *BoA*. They are very comprehensive, better illustrated and easier to read (less telegraphic) than *BoA*. In multispecific families, the family section permits more consideration of comparative aspects (taxonomy, competition, *etc.*) than in *BoA*. Non-African information about African species is also better integrated. *HBW* has generally more detail for many groups than *BoA*, especially more biology, but less detail per species. However, it is difficult to pin down most general statements to the species for which the information is known. This makes it hard to define gaps in knowledge for individual species.

Family and species accounts are selectively referenced (major studies, regional works and information from little-studied areas) at the end of each. The reference to the original description of each taxon is also given.

The Introduction is a text-book style, but readable, account of the characteristics of Class Aves: not just a nod to bird biology, but 37 large pages of interesting material.

Most mistakes are minor, some of an iberian nature (e.g. isquium for ischium). However, there are some errors of fact or interpretation, and some uncritical statements; e.g. "large size, colonial nesting and very specialized habits ... make [herons] extremely vulnerable to any direct attacks and also to environmental changes. Nevertheless, due to their great capacity for survival, only a few ... are seriously threatened". What causes this "great capacity for survival"? The statement merely begs that question. And what is one to make of the assertion (p. 199) that "By attracting sunlight, this patch [of dark feathers around an albatross's eye] improves vision, as it deviates sunlight that would otherwise strike the eye directly."? Are the authors aware of some recent research on relativity? Other statements of a similar nature are, if not common, rather too frequent for scientific comfort.

Most of us use *BoA* most as an identification reference. *HBW* may unnecessarily have reduced its market by not attempting to compete. To have included more plumage illustrations and better descriptions would have enabled many to do without regional works, by buying only this series. Still, the two works basically serve different functions. *HBW* is a good introduction to bird families and is excellent on group biology; it is also the better read. *BoA* is better for Africa, for individual species and for identification. Given the prices of the two series, most of us will have to be content with only one.