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Birds of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Socotra.

Author: Schwab, Larry

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Book Reviews

EDITED BY R. TODD ENGSTROM

The following critiques express the opinions of the individual evaluators regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and value of the books they review. As such, the appraisals are subjective assessments and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or any official policy of the American Ornithologists' Union.

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Birds of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Socotra.—Nigel Redman, Terry Stevenson, and John Fanshawe. 2009. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 496 pp., 2,600 illustrations on 213 full color plates, distribution maps for every species. ISBN 9780691143453. Softcover, $40.00.—This is the first field guide to cover all bird species found in the Horn of Africa. It is a practical and graceful book and can be carried and used efficiently afield.

The "Horn" of Africa is so named because of its geographic and cartographic shape. It extends into the Arabian Sea, bounded by the Gulf of Aden to the north and the Indian Ocean to the south. The region is located almost entirely between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator, save a tiny corner of southern Somalia that juts slightly into the Southern Hemisphere.

Within this volcanically active tectonic area bisected by the Great Rift Valley, wonderfully diverse in natural features and the traditional peoples living there, more than 1,000 species of birds—including 30 endemics in Ethiopia and Eritrea alone—can be found. The Danakil Depression, one of the world's lowest points of land below sea level, and the Simien Mountains, the highest continuous range in Africa, typify the region's physiographic extremes.

The spectacular birdlife in the Horn belies chronic regional socioeconomic difficulties exacerbated by revolution, chronic poverty, famine, and war. Ethiopia is the largest and most accessible of

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the nations covered by this guide. The Socotra Archipelago is difficult to reach, and currently travel in Somalia, a country without a functional government, is dangerous for visitors. Ethiopia welcomes tourists, and its friendly and curious people make it an outstanding cultural and fascinating ornithological travel destination.

Ornithology is a young science in Africa. As recently as the 1970s, the six-volume handbooks by C. W. Mackworth-Praed and Captain C. H. B. Grant were the definitive reference books and bird guides for Africa. The two bulky M–P and G volumes of *Birds of Eastern and Northeastern Africa* were the final word on birds of the Horn of Africa and East Africa in the field and library. *A Checklist of the Birds of Ethiopia* (1971) by E. K. Urban and L. H. Brown, the definitive compilation of avian occurrence and distribution in Ethiopia, has been reprinted several times. The publication of *The Birds of Africa*—seven exceptional reference volumes by Brown, Fry, Keith, Newman, and Urban published from 1972 to 2003—was the culmination of the extraordinary efforts by dedicated scientists, teachers, and artists who brought together all salient knowledge of African ornithology. These works were not easily carried to the field because of their size and weight.

A companion to this book, *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa* (2002) by Stevenson and Fanshawe (two of the authors of *Birds of the Horn of Africa*), was in part duplicated for inclusion in *Birds of the Horn of Africa*. Approximately 20% of the birds in the Horn of Africa do not occur in the East African region. Many of the plates published in the East African guide were reformatted, and new artwork representing species found in the Horn (and not in East Africa) has been added. John Gale and Brian Small deserve kudos for their precise and balanced new artwork in *Birds of the Horn of Africa*.

Color-coded field distribution maps and descriptions for every species are included on the pages facing the plates in this title. Although it is lengthy (nearly 500 pages), efficient formatting makes this a handy and complete field companion. The 136 "important bird areas" in the region are clearly represented by maps. The inside front cover features a detailed map of the region covered. The reinforced soft binding and covers appear to be durable.

There is an interesting follow-up story about one of the nightjars, the Nechisar Nightjar (*Caprimulgus solala*). This Ethiopian endemic is believed to be the only bird in the world that has been accepted by science as a distinct species on the basis of a description that uses only one wing as physical evidence (plate 98, p. 228). Since publication of this book, a team of ornithologists traveled to the Nechisar Plain in southern Ethiopia for the purpose of finding the bird. The nightjar was seen, videotaped, and nearly captured using an improvised portable mist net fashioned from mosquito netting, packaging wire, and a wooden handle purchased from an Ethiopian *ikabet* (shop in the local market). Such is the adventure of ornithology in Africa, be it for fun, science, or both.

A contemporary ornithological compilation, *Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Ash and Atkins 2009), also reviewed in this issue, nicely complements field identification of the Horn's avian beauty with atlas distribution maps and chapters on geology, vegetation, climate, habitats, migration, and conservation.

On the cover of *Birds of the Horn of Africa*, Stresemann's Bush Crow (*Zavattariornis stresemanni*)—one of Ethiopia's localized and unique endemics—invites any traveler to the Horn of Africa, whether amateur or professional, to enjoy this essential title. (See the cover of the recent field guide, *Birds of Africa South of the Sahara* [Sinclair and Ryan 2003], for another unique endemic bird species: the rare, colorful, and localized Prince Ruspoli's Turaco [*Tauraco ruspolii*] of southern Ethiopia.) *Birds of the Horn of Africa* is a field guide of the highest quality and meets the long-time need to consolidate all species of this region in an easy-to-use volume. Field worthy and indispensable as an identification and learning tool, it is recommended without qualification as a remarkable and essential addition to the libraries of professional ornithologists, birders, and everyone who studies African birds.—Larry Schwab, *West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia 26505, USA. E-mail: larryschwab@verizon.net*

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