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The book has 585 pages of text, covering 319 species in a popular family of birds that has fascinated people since long before we were literate, but has only 7.7 pages of literature citations. Barry Taylor’s recent (1998), similarly formatted, and highly informative book Rails, for example, covers 145 more poorly studied species with 557 pages of text followed by 34.8 pages of literature citations. This 10-fold difference (0.024 citation-pages per species in Pigeons and Doves vs. 0.24 in Rails) undermines the scholarship in the former and therefore limits its utility to scientists. Related to that is Gibbs et al.’s exceedingly brief introduction (pp. 13–15).

Selfishly I note that, from 1980 to 1999, I published 45 journal articles or chapters in books that dealt substantially or exclusively with columbids, especially on islands. Gibbs et al. cite none of them, even though much of what they mention about extinction of Polynesian columbids (pp. 13, 14, 413, 543) is derived from those papers. Ignoring my papers also results in inaccurate range maps for Polynesian columbids, whether you consider just the modern range or the combined modern and prehistoric range, the latter being most useful to biogeographers. Should I feel bad that Gibbs et al. opted not to cite any of my papers? If the book were meant to be a superficial skimming once-over the columbids, the answer would be no. Given the comprehensive and authoritative intent of this work (see p. 16 as well as the dust jacket and advertisements), however, they should have given credit where it is due. How, for example, could they have failed to cite Baptista et al. (Handbook of Birds of the World, 4:60–243), the only other place where all living species of columbids are illustrated in color?

Gibbs et al. state their indebtedness to Nigel Collar for “meticulous and dedicated editing of the entire text” (p. 12). British conservationists are aware of, and their work benefits from, my and other overlooked research (published in journals such as Conservation Biology), but they are disinclined to cite it because we are evil museum scientists who occasionally collect birds. A “holier than thou” attitude pervades many bird books written in Britain these days. (Pigeons and Doves was produced at Pica Press in Britain; it is sold in the colonies by Yale University Press.)

Pigeons and Doves is important for providing modern color plates, range maps, and descriptions of plumages, including subspecies, of columbids world-wide. Other aspects of columbid biology (systematics, evolution, biogeography, behavior, foraging ecology, breeding biology, etc.) are poorly covered. On average, birdwatchers will like it more than ornithologists. This is what we have come to expect nowadays from university presses, who realize that birdwatchers make up a larger market than scientists.—David W. Steadman, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, P.O. Box 117800,