

Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 6

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Source: The Auk, 119(2) : 573-574

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038\(2002\)119\[0573:HOTBOT\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038(2002)119[0573:HOTBOT]2.0.CO;2)

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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.

The Auk 119(2):573–574, 2002

Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 6.—Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott, and Jordi Sargatal, Eds. 2001. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. 589 pp., 45 color plates, 385 photographs, 270 distribution maps. ISBN 84-87334-30X. \$185.00.—Covering the 12 families in the orders Coliiformes (Coliidae), Trogoniformes (Trogonidae), and Coraciiformes (Alcedinidae, Todidae, Momotidae, Meropidae, Coraciidae, Brachypteraciidae, Leptosomidae, Upupidae, Phoeniculidae, and Bucerotidae), this volume continues the exemplary standards of scholarship and elegant format established with the first five books of the series. Although taxa from jacamars through woodpeckers were originally intended to be included in the present volume, for reasons of space, abundance of high-quality material, and the burgeoning literature, those groups are now destined to have a volume of their own, number 7. Similar considerations prompted the editorial team to propose other major changes in the series. Future treatment of passerines, for example, will be expanded to occupy nine (!) additional volumes. To determine the feasibility of that goal and in part to organize content, the editors surveyed readers' opinions via a brief questionnaire included as a leaflet with the mailing of volume 6. There the editors also sought views on another tentative plan, to publish a parallel series of volumes entitled *Handbook of the Mammals of the World*. Undaunted and without hesitation, members of the dedicated editorial team are willing to mortgage their collective futures for the monumental task ahead. When their expanded plans come to fruition, biologists, conservationists, and resource managers around the world will be rewarded with what is destined to become a matchless series of reference works on the higher vertebrates.

Volume 6 is introduced with a masterly essay "Avian Bioacoustics," a draft of which was written by Luis Baptista. After his unexpected death in June 2000, Donald E. Kroodsma completed and revised the manuscript. Also in tribute to Baptista, Kroodsma asked vocal researchers globally to pose the ques-

tion in avian bioacoustics they would most like answered. Their 77 responses are cleverly distributed as marginal comments throughout the essay. Although this chapter connects only remotely with the contents of the remainder of the volume, in scope and completeness (483 references cited!) it is the most concise and comprehensive single treatment of bird vocalizations now in the literature.

As a group, the species of birds covered in this volume are among the most strikingly colored in existence and, hence, extremely photogenic. The long series of color photographs and plates thus provide an unparalleled, eye-popping experience. Context in addition to pose also guided choice of photos. Various kingfishers were filmed while seizing fish underwater, Speckled Mousebirds (*Colius striatus*) were photographed roosting in tight wads, and a time-series of shots shows the gymnastics of a preening Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). Many other species were photographed in more typical poses while foraging or simply perched, others while copulating or displaying. Effectively scattered through the text are full-page photos in which the bird is subordinated to the background. Such is the dramatic shot of a Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) in Italy perched in a dark, heavily wooded swamp and that of a Lilac-breasted Roller (*Coracias caudatus*) in Kenya, closely behind which looms in frontal view a bull elephant, filling the frame with its immensity. Overall only exceptional photos were chosen for inclusion, attesting to the skill of both photographers and editors, and resulting in as splendid a gallery as one could imagine. Nine illustrators prepared the uniformly outstanding color plates. These enable one to survey quickly the appearance of every known species and distinctive geographic forms in all included families. Broad-brush distribution maps accompany the accounts of each species, usually in close proximity to the appropriate color plate. One can rapidly survey the appearance and geographic ranges of congeners, thus underscoring an outstanding feature of the vol-

ume—the ease with which information can be extracted.

The section “Status and Conservation” for each species is a particularly useful entry. These sections and the accompanying maps are among the few portions of this series that will need updating in the not-too-distant future as habitat destruction exacts its relentless toll on the world’s avifauna.

As in earlier volumes, the text is detailed, authoritative, and richly referenced with approximately 6,000 titles, many of which were published in the 1990s and even 2000. Another useful feature typically lacking from similar works is a list of 472 references of scientific descriptions.

Easily the most comprehensive source of information on world birds, this stunning series is indispensable to students and researchers at all levels and will remain so far into the future. Ornithologists around the globe should anticipate the appearance of the remaining volumes with unbridled enthusiasm.—NED K. JOHNSON, *Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and Department of Integrative Biology, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720-3160, USA. E-mail: neddo@socrates.berkeley.edu*
