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Five Out of Africa

Birds of Eastern Africa.—Ber van Perlo. 1995. Princeton Illustrated Checklists, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 301 pp., 96 color plates, 1487 maps. ISBN 0-691-09033-5. $24.95 (paper).

Birds of Southern Africa.—Ber van Perlo. 1999. Princeton Illustrated Checklists, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 320 pp., 84 color plates, 1234 maps (including four color). ISBN 0-691-09034-3. $24.95 (paper).

These two books are paperback reprints of the Collins Illustrated Checklist series. The first covers all 1487 bird species found in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopa, Eritrea, Somalia, and Socotra Island. The second covers approximately 1228 species that occur in South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Angola. The books are compact, convenient guides for birders and scientists interested in identifying birds while visiting the regions. Their small, lightweight sizes (approx. 19 × 12.5 × 2 cm, 500 gm) make for easy packing and carrying in the back pocket while trudging around the countryside. They are the perfect alternative to the larger guides that are too large for traveling and often have more information than is necessary for field identification. Illustrations by the author are good, but reproduction has lost some clarity; this does not much hamper bird identification. Useful illustrations distinguish between confusing species, for example, the wing and tail patterns in nightjars. There are illustrations for both sexes of most dimorphic species, and immature forms are sometimes included. Brief physical, habitat, vocal, and behavioral characteristics are provided opposite each illustration and are helpful for field identifications. Small species-specific range maps are grouped at the end of the book. These two volumes are valuable primarily as general field references; identifications and information necessary for technical work should be verified with more detailed works such as The *Birds of Africa* series (1982–2000, Academic Press, New York) and *African Handbook of Birds* (Mackworth-Praed and Grant, 1960–1973, Longmans, London). For a more in-depth review, see Bennun (2000, Wilson Bulletin 112:566).

A Guide to the Birds of Western Africa.—Nik Borrow and Ron Demey. 2001. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 832 pp., 147 color plates, 1100+ color range maps. ISBN 0-691-09520-5. $75.00 (cloth).

This attractive field guide covers all 1285 species of birds found in the 23 sub-Saharan African countries west of Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, including Cape Verde and Gulf of Guinea Islands. Each species is illustrated with one or more color drawings (sexes and immature forms are usually included when different), next to which are brief descriptions of habitat, distribution, abundance, body length, and distinguishing characteristics. More detailed information appears in the text descriptions, which are grouped after all of the plates. Colored range maps for most species are placed with each description. Illustrations are of a relatively high quality and are well reproduced. There is an extensive reference section, grouped topically, that will be useful for the student of African avifauna. This comprehensive, authoritative book is a bit large (approx. 24.5 × 18.5 × 5 cm, 2.1 kg) for the casual birder visiting the region, but would be invaluable for serious birders and scientists working in or visiting the area. It would also make an excellent addition to a collection of field guides for home or office use.

The Birds of Angola.—W. R. J. Dean. 2000. BOU Checklist Series:18. British Ornithologists' Union, Herts, UK. 433 pp., 9 maps, 33 color photographs, 4 appendices. ISBN 0-907446-22-1. £50 (cloth).

This book represents a valuable attempt to summarize the available information on the avifauna of this war-torn country. The book is worth obtaining for the introduction alone, a history of Angolan ornithological exploration, which stopped abruptly in 1974. It provides an overview to the geography of this little-known region, which ranges from evergreen Guinean Forest in the north to the Namib Desert in the south. The author summarizes the zoogeography, migration, and breeding patterns of Angolan birds and provides a distressing discussion of the current state of conservation under civil war conditions. There is some hope for the future given the low human density, large tracts of protected lands (5.5% of the country), abandonment of plantations, and recent peace accord signed by warring factions. Considering how little work has been done in the country over the last three decades, the book provides a comprehensive summary of what is known of the avifauna. The bulk of the book is devoted to accounts for 915 species that have been found in the country. Included are brief descriptions of abundance, habitat, and distribution, as well as lists of specimens collected at various localities and museums where specimens are held. A gazetteer, including latitude-longitude coordinates, is provided for place names. The ''distribution'' maps for nine species actually show locations where specimens were collected and do not serve as range maps. Tables of weights, band returns, and rainfall are provided in appendices. There are no illustrations of birds (some of the species are illustrated for the first time in van Perlo 1999, reviewed above). The book whets the appetite for more information and exploration of this diverse region, but

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that enthusiasm is dampened by the fact, imparted in the ''Editor's Foreword'' that ''. . . the whole of Angola must be considered a mined area.'' Unfortunately, the valuable research presented in this volume is not likely to be greatly augmented with field data for some time to come.

The Birds of Africa, Volume VI (Picathartes to Oxpeckers).—C. H. Fry, S. Keith, and E. K. Urban (eds.). 2000. Academic Press, San Diego, California. 724 pp., 36 color plates. ISBN 0-12-137306-1. $189.95 (cloth).

Another volume in the sterling series on the birds of Africa, this second-to-last volume covers 324 species. Beautifully detailed color illustrations (by Martin Woodcock) of 310 species and many subspecies accompany the text in 36 plates dispersed throughout the book. There are also black-and-white drawings throughout, detailing characteristic behaviors and, in some cases, distinguishing features of subspecies. Most of these line drawings (by Ian Willis) are quite nice, but a few are rather crude and look like they were printed directly from field notes (e.g., Bush Blackcap, *Lioptilus nigricapillus*, p. 67). Accounts provide details on species range and physical description, as well as briefer information on field identification, vocalizations, habitat and behavior, food, and breeding biology. Each account includes a tricolored (black, white, and red) range map. A discography and extensive topical bibliography are useful features. The amount of work that went into preparing this single volume is truly impressive, and the fact that there are five others and one more in preparation, with just as much detail, is nothing less than mind-boggling.—WILLIAM I. BOARMAN, Western Ecological Research Center, U.S. Geological Survey, San Diego, CA 92123, e-mail: william_boarman@usgs.gov

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