

ticked, but it is a good idea to add information on species as new data become available. That is until version seven is printed.

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Birds of Europe, Russia, China and Japan: Passerines, Tyrant Flycatchers to Buntings

By Norman Arlott. 2007. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540-5237 USA. 240 pages. U.S.\$29.95. Paper.

My wife and I recently decided to visit northern China and Mongolia [the Silk Road]. This left me with a dilemma; which bird book or books would I need to take to get adequate coverage. I did not want to pay \$100 or more for a paperback copy of *A Field Guide to the Birds of China* (John MacKinnon and Karen Phillips, Oxford University Press, New York). My *Birds of Russia* (Flint et al.) gives fair coverage but the illustrations are not as precise as I would like them, particularly for warblers, etc. *Birds of China* (De Schauensee) only illustrates some of the species and gives descriptions of range only and you need a thorough knowledge of China's geography to follow these descriptions. *Birds of India* (Grimmett et al.) is a much better guide with a lot of species covered [as winter visitors], but the coverage is far to the south so the range maps are useless.

Then Princeton announced *Birds of Europe, Russia, China and Japan* and I thought it would be just right for my purposes. While the book covers only the passerines (from Tyrant Flycatchers to Buntings), it is exactly these groups for which I needed a better, more up-to-date book. The non-passerines, like ducks and gulls, tend to be more distinctive and are suitably covered in previous books.

Technically Princeton calls this book an illustrated checklist. Each species has an illustration or two with very brief facing-page text. At the back of the book are range maps. While the text presents little about each species but key features, it is perfect for the traveller. It measures only 5" × 7" × ½" [12.5 × 17.5 × 2 cm] and weighs 14 oz [100 g or around half a normal field guide].

The range maps are 2" × ¾" [5 × 2 cm] and cover from Britain to Kamchatka, from Svalbard to Northern India. As there are no country boundaries [these would make the little map too cluttered] I found it helpful to create a mask with a piece of clear plastic sheet. I traced the outline of the map in blue, then, using Google Earth as a guide [Google Earth has a similar orientation to these maps] I shaded in transparent yellow the region I plan to visit. I can now place the mask over each map and quickly see if I will be in any bird's range. This was somewhat satisfactory. I compared my list created with the mask to actual trip lists and I was in error by around 15 percent.

Although the book's title suggests it covers Europe, Russia, China and Japan, the maps go much further. For example it includes the Nile Valley Sunbird of the Middle East and the Purple Sunbird of India, as well as the geographically restricted Sinai Rosefinch and Sub-Sahara's Blandford's Lark. I am not sure of the author's rationale for including birds like the Rosy-patched Shrike, a purely African species [but I am happy he did so].

The critical illustrations are those of difficult to identify birds such as warblers and some finches. Arlott has been illustrating bird books for many years [my first Arlott book is over 40 years old]. His skill has grown dramatically and his most recent work is top quality. My copy has all the illustrated species looking a little dark. [Technically the hue is correct but the illustrations are over saturated and this is part of the printer's quality control. North American readers will see this when looking at the Cedar Waxwing and Varied Thrush illustrations. Both are way more intense than the real birds I have seen this year.] In detail though the artwork is excellent. When I looked at Arctic Warbler and try to separate it from its congener leaf warblers or the Beautiful Rosefinch from its relatives then the relevant field marks are apparent. North Americans will have no difficulty identifying wood warblers using this guide, even with the intense colours. [I was surprised to find over 40 "North American" species, such as Wood Warblers and Icterids, have been seen in this region as vagrants.]

This book solved my problem and will be ideal for other travelers to this large region. I look forward to a similar book on the non-passerines. I hope Princeton does well with their checklist series [I believe they have a dozen titles] as they are so much more convenient when luggage weight is critical.

Literature Cited

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