

the *Handbook of Birds of the World* lists a completely separate species with the same name, the Alagoas Antwren (*Myrmotherula snowi*).

I did a less intensive check of the notorious woodcreepers and did not find any taxonomic problems. I did note that the authors had split the Buff-throated Woodcreeper (primarily Brazil) to give the Cocoa Woodcreeper (Costa Rica and north). I have been adding notes on specific details to my Birds of Costa Rica (*A Guide to the Birds of Costa Rica*, by F. Gary Stiles and Alexander F. Skutch, Cornell University Press, 1989) to verify during my visit to that country in February 2004.

Another important difference between this volume and the others is that the authors have used a far higher proportion of unpublished material. Despite the lack of a formal peer review, I am sure the authors were judicious in the selection of material. Such unpublished data are identified in the text.

Handbook of Birds of the World Volume 8 opens with an essay on the history of bird classification by Murray Bruce. This provides a useful background to the taxonomic difficulties that will follow with the passerines. In places the text is somewhat dry and biblical in that it moves from one master to student after another, but this is part of the process of understanding the history of taxonomy.

The quality of the artwork is consistent with the other volumes. I did my usual scan for errors and could find none. The almost 500 colour photographs are quite remarkable. The quality is similar to other volumes. We

need, however, to remember it is easy to photograph a large, unafraid Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii*), but it is a real challenge to achieve the same quality with skulking understory birds. Any one who has visited the rainforest will know how hard it can be to see these birds clearly for more than a few seconds. There is one photograph of a Scalloped Antbird (*Myrmeciza ruficauda*) that exemplifies these problems. The bird is barely visible; only its round eye and the fact it is likely in the centre of the photograph gives it away. Another innovation is the English names in the photograph captions are now in bold font, making them much easier to find. A typical photo caption is one to two paragraphs long and I found the English name was difficult to pick out when scanning for a particular species in previous editions.

The range maps are similar to previous editions with one important change. These maps now include the major rivers. Thus it is much easier to judge a bird's range. For example, it is easy to pick out the Rios Napo, Negro and Salimoes as Amazon tributaries, which in turn allows the reader to estimate the position of Belem, Manaus and the Ecuadorian border. The book ends with about 4000 bibliographical references that include some text changes to make them easier to use.

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Important Bird Areas in Africa and Associated Islands: Priority Sites for Conservation

By L. D. C. Fishpool, and M. I. Evans. 2001. Newbury and Cambridge, UK. Pisces Publications and BirdLife International (BirdLife Conservation Series Number 11).

This publication is by no means a booklet. While I was reading it during connecting flights from Seattle to Vancouver, the U.S. customs officer asked me whether I stole the local phone book. Instead, this book presents the major large-scale conservation data source for African birds and their habitats. It's the first and urgently needed consistent data collection of its kind for Africa. Therefore, the authors presented a milestone publication of international importance for global biodiversity and conservation management.

The Important Bird Area (IBA) concept is already well established, and carried out world-wide. This book deals in 1144 pages with descriptions of 1228 IBAs in 68 African countries and associated islands. Approximately 100 authors contributed to this unique publication, most of them with an English or anglophone background. This cultural bias is obvious throughout the entire book. For instance, the countries with the longest text sections, the best information, and with most of the IBAs, are usually the ones with a European, and specifically British, colonial history: Kenya,

Tanzania, Ethiopia, Madagascar and South Africa. Yes, it's true that countries with the highest biodiversity usually carry the richest natural resources and therefore, historically attracted European countries. However, less than 3% of the cited literature comes from African contributors, confirming the anglophone bias in African avian investigations and conservation. From a truly "global village" perspective and treating its citizens fairly and equally, African readers might be concerned. Summaries in Swahili, French, Portuguese or in any other language are not provided either.

The data collection and IBA process is well described in this book. Four data sources were used to derive the IBAs for all of Africa: information from *Birds to Watch 2*, The BirdLife Biodiversity Project, atlases of Afrotropical bird distributions, and Wetlands International data. Many international conservation agencies contributed as well, but I am not sure if all the information and publications on Africa available world-wide were used, e.g. Russian ones. The book has 30 descriptive photos of African biomes; 2313 species of birds are covered (referred to by their scientific names) and their population estimates are provided. Readers interested in seabirds will like the great

information provided for these species in the African island chapters. It is commendable that relevant mammals, reptiles and amphibians are also considered by the authors. Ten very detailed appendices complete the book. The African IBA program started as late as 1993, and knowing African and international working conditions the authors have to be congratulated and highly respected for their achievements and skills related to African (bird) conservation.

The outlined IBAs link well with the major international agreements and conservation programs such as CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity), RAMSAR, WHC (World Heritage Convention), CMS (Bonn Convention), AEWA (Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds), CITES (Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species), UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification), UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) and UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program. One hopes they will make a difference.

For this major publication, BirdLife International was supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Global Environmental Facility (GEF), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Pisces Publications and others. Considering the magnitude of these global agencies and their believed expertise, some topics in this publication are remarkable and should be further addressed here. For instance, the statement in this book that IBAs are generally connecting the important sites and that they present a network remains open for discussion. Not all African birds covered in this publication will be found in social aggregations, as assumed for the RAMSAR convention (after which concept the IBAs are designed). Another serious flaw could lie in the representativeness of IBA locations. Birds and IBAs can only be meaningful indicators (as claimed in this book) when they come from a sampling regime representative in time and space. Usually, IBAs were not derived from such a sound and spatial research design, but instead established from queries, existing data and traditional or local knowledge on where most birds would be located throughout seasons. For a large continent like Africa with inadequate infrastructure, this information might be biased by human access or other factors constraining equal survey effort. Do IBAs present nothing but a "land grab"? The least one can say is that these IBAs don't acknowledge directly bird migration corridors, as commonly implemented in other continents for avian conservation management. In the methods chapter of this book, BirdLife makes clear that convenience, but not scientific input, played a major role for African IBA delineations; there is no plan to include research in future actions! Science-based decision-making, the major paradigm in other parts of the world, seems to be left out when it comes to African IBAs. Much science is still needed, e.g. to assess bird turnover rates in important IBAs covering at least 1% of global species populations. In the ab-

sence of any other and existing African bird conservation exercises, we have to use these IBAs and perceive them as a world-class achievement. The African IBAs are part of the IBA and World Bird Database (WBD); however, much more could be done with these data to stimulate a digital and web-based infrastructure and data provision for decision-making and for the scientific community world-wide on topics related to Africa.

BirdLife bases its work on Community-based Conservation (CBC): "This encompasses the principles that conservation cannot and should not be pursued against the interest and wishes of local people...". "...it is self-evident that conservation action on the ground will only be sustainable in the long-term if it is undertaken with and by the people living in and around the high-biodiversity areas". This statement, the ultimate BirdLife paradigm, baldly ignores what sustainability originally means ("don't use more than what re-grows") and is easily proven wrong by the huge number of sad examples world-wide where sustainability of resources was not achieved: yes, a local human population can overharvest a natural resource indeed. It might well be that this so-called democratic and sustainable CBC policy is the major reason why agency conservation so far has failed to save global biodiversity and is achieving less than what is possible and what should be done; it harms global biodiversity and humans alike. Prospects for the global biodiversity future are known to be dim.

While nature gets lost at an incredible speed world-wide, we happen to write ever bigger and better books on these very last leftovers. The human misery in Africa alone appears to be overwhelming and almost unsolvable, this book deals with avian aspects though. Africa is a conservation paradox heavily reflecting the global situation and globalization. Unfortunately, BirdLife spares less than a page in this book on this crucial topic.

Only high quality data convince the public and in political conservation discussions. In these regards the book is weak for two reasons: presented data are not always highest quality, and Africa's situation is getting worse every day, definitely beyond the publication of this book. Bird research, and certainly birding, has not halted the African conservation chaos, yet.

I think all these things need to be known when interpreting African IBAs for biodiversity and conservation management. This book remains a unique, and the best available, large-scale data compilation for Africa's avian and habitat conservation. It is hoped that this book and the global situation will allow Africa and its resources to be saved; ignoring America and the rest of the world though in this context might prove fatal for this continent and its (avian) biodiversity.

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