

A Guide to the Birds of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives

By Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp, and Tim Inskipp. With the collaboration of Sarath Kotagama and Shahid Ali. 2012. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540 USA. 528 pages. 39.50 USD. Paper.

When I purchased the first edition of this book I was very pleased [see Mark Gawn's excellent review in CFN 115-1]. I used it successfully in several parts of India. However, as Mark noted, there were some weak points. As many of the range maps were distant from the text, I found it very frustrating to have to flip back and forth. Each illustration carried a number and you had to match this number to the range map number. While the illustrations were good, they were often crowded at 10, 12 or even more to a page.

The second edition has 73 new, additional plates and others are repainted so that the number of birds per page has been reduced. This makes this edition much clearer and easier to use. In all there are 1,375 species illustrated by 19 artists [seven more than the original] and all are good quality. They have dropped the numbering systems and matching bird and text is intuitive. Also all maps [and the text] are opposite the plates, a far more sensible arrangement. These changes have made the book bigger; 37% by weight. But then this has never been a pocket field guide.

The range maps were somewhat larger; about a third. I found them easier to read. The colour coding is more complex and therefore imparts more detailed information.

There are some name and taxonomic changes. The Common and Black-rumped Flameback are now called the Greater and Lesser Goldenback respectively. The index and the account list the alternative name so it is

easy to reference back to the old name. [They have eliminated the silly misnumbering of the Black-rumped Flameback female in the illustration]. There are several splits. I recently photographed the tree-nesting Slender-billed Vulture, now distinct from the cliff-nesting Long-billed Vulture. I spent a lot of time identifying the migratory Black-eared Kites and the resident Black Kites to be sure I could count the two species. [The Calcutta dump has a thousand or so kites of both species, if you can stand the smell!]

Once again the authors depict subspecies such as the Puff-throated Babbler [*Pellorneum ruficeps mandelli* and *P.r. ruficeps*]. In this case there are several disputable subspecies in various parts of India. Unfortunately the authors do not note the locations for each subspecies. Another failing is the lack of altitudinal information. Some of the hill species have characteristic altitudinal requirements and this information is available and would be most useful.

Overall, the changes have made this is a great field guide that is easy to use in the field. While I did not carry it with me because of its size, I keep it handy on the boat or in the car. The only time I had problems was in identifying *Acrocephalus* and *Phylloscopus* warblers, but this had nothing to do with this fine book!

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