

Birds of the Kenya's Rift Valley

By Adam S. Kennedy. 2014. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ, USA, 08540-5237. 256 pages, 19.75 USD, Paper.

Birds of Kenya's Rift Valley is the fourth in a series of Princeton University Press WILDGuides by Adam Scott Kennedy, a former safari camp manager and now full-time professional guide. This new field guide focuses on the Kenya's portion of the Rift Valley, which runs through East Africa from the Gulf of Aden south to Mozambique. Kenya's Rift is rich in bird life, with a variety of habitats from soda Lake Magadi and the lush wetlands of Lake Navaisha to the cliffs of Hell's Gate. In particular, Lake Nakuru and Lake Bogoria are famed for their vast flocks of flamingos, which can number in excess of one million birds. Kenya is a renowned location for birding, and this field guide is well suited for visitors of the many national parks and Important Bird Areas of the Rift Valley.

Not surprisingly, there is considerable overlap with Kennedy's two previous bird guides; half of the 320 species covered in the Rift Valley guide are also included in the *Birds of the Masai Mara*. Nonetheless, *Birds of Kenya's Rift Valley* covers a fair bit of new ground since there are approximately 1100 avian species known from Kenya, and the Rift Valley encompasses habitats and areas not found in his Serengeti and Masai Mara guides. For example, Kennedy devotes a full page to Sharpe's Longclaw (*Hemimacronyx sharpei*), an imperilled grassland species found in the Rift Valley highlands. Unfortunately, the guide does not include the similarly endangered Abedare Cisticola (*Cisticola aberdare*), which is also found in the highland grasslands of Mau Narok and the Abedares. Oddly, it also doesn't include such notable species as the Secretary Bird and Kori Bustard. However, the guide does cover 19 species of weavers and no less than ten species of

starlings (including the aptly named Superb Starling), which may be surprising to many North Americans used to just one garden variety starling.

Rather than by standard taxonomic order, the guide is arranged into six sections: *Lakes and Marsh*; *Up in the Air*; *Birds of Prey*; *Grasslands and Open Areas*; *Woodland, Scrub and Garden*; and *Nightbirds*. The intent is to help novices more rapidly locate the likely bird species in the guide based on where it is observed, or by groups of birds (raptors, aerial specialists, nocturnal birds) that may range widely over many habitats. This approach has its limitations due to poorly defined or overlapping groups (I must admit I prefer the traditional approach), but may make it easier for beginning birders to identify potential candidates.

What sets this guide apart from other field guides are the 500+ spectacular photographs and impressive artistry of the layout, with truly seamless blending of multiple photos. There are typically 2-3 species per page, with full page accounts for some of the more charismatic or spectacular species such as the Long-tailed Widowbird and Hemprich's Hornbill. The informative and accessible species' accounts have tips on identification and similar species, and touch upon distinctive songs or calls, behaviour, ecology, and other points of interest.

The guide is "intended to be an inspirational, portable, and easy-to-use introduction to the many hundreds of species that have been recorded in the Rift Valley". At 540 g, *Birds of Kenya's Rift Valley* definitely more compact than the more comprehensive *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* (1000 g, 576 pages, 1114 spp.) by Zimmerman *et al.*, or Stevenson and

Fanshawe's *Birds of East Africa* (1125 g, 602 pages, 1388 spp.). Serious birders will likely want to carry one of these more detailed guides, but Kennedy's new book would serve most safari goers well in Kenya's Rift Valley, and its great photos make it a worthy addition to any birder's bookshelf.

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