

# Book Reviews

## ZOOLOGY

### The Birds of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi

By Terry Stevenson and John Fanshawe. 2006. Princeton University Press: 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540 USA. 640 pages U.S. \$35.00 Paper.

*Birds of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi* is one of a number of bird guide books on this region. Indeed, this publication is a paperback version of the award-winning 2001 hardback edition. It has not been updated.

The first of these books I bought was *Birds of East Africa* by Williams and Arlott, published in 1963. At the time I was very pleased at the style and quality of this work. Some 665 species were illustrated. In 1999 this was superseded by *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* by Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson. This book was a giant leap forward with 1084 species illustrated (even though this only covered 40% of the area of East Africa.) The illustrations increased by 419 species despite the smaller area covered. Also the quality of the artwork and printing was far better and was a closer match to European and North American guides. Now we have the new *Birds of East Africa* with Norm Arlott again providing much of the artwork. This volume illustrates 1388 species and is another, although smaller leap forward.

*Birds of East Africa* covers the resident, migrant, and vagrant bird species of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the two smaller countries of Rwanda and Burundi (the area of these two together is less than 3% of the region, but adds a surprising number of species to the list). The text is high quality and faces the colour plate page (a more convenient format). The species accounts describe identification, status, range, habits, and voice. The colour distribution maps are small, but clear.

The question now arises, which is the better book for the visitor going on typical trips to the major parks in Kenya and northern Tanzania? *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* is slightly smaller (around 5%) and covers less territory. While this loses about 20% of the species, most of these are specialist species confined to Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi (about 225 species that are wholly or primarily confined to those countries). The remainder are species predominantly from southern Tanzania.

To my eye the artwork in *The Birds of East Africa* is noticeably better both for the colourful species and the LBJ's ("Little Brown Jobs": warblers and Cisticolas), but this not a huge difference. I checked several species from my slide collection and found *Birds*

*of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi* was generally more accurate. The user will find it very difficult to separate Long-billed from Tawny pipit using *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania*, but will find only a small improvement with *Birds of East Africa* as these birds are difficult to separate anyway.

There is not much to choose between the texts (although it is more extensive in *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania*) and the coverage of endemics is very similar. It is easier to have the text, illustration and map side by side (*Birds of East Africa*). The biggest difference lies in the range maps. The *Birds of East Africa* shows only a single range designation, covering winter, summer and migratory ranges. In comparison, *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* shows summer and winter ranges separately. Just as important, *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* more clearly defines where the birds are located. For example waterside birds like bitterns and herons are shown in localities where water occurs. Similarly plains species are shown in the plains. The *Birds of East Africa* maps blanket the entire area that water birds can occur giving the impression they can be anywhere, even in dry savannah.

*Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* includes a map of region inside its front cover that shows the key locations mentioned in the text. Although *The Birds of East Africa* has maps that show features (like forest cover), they do not depict the location of national parks, cities, etc. Neither book gives alternative names, which is a bit irritating when making comparisons with park checklists, older books, trip reports etc. (e.g. *Schoenicola brevirostris* is called the Fan-tailed Grassbird or Broad-tailed Warbler and not to be confused with *Cisticola juncidis* called the Fan-tailed Warbler but now known as the Zitting Cisticola.)

If you are planning a trip that includes Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda or Burundi, *The Birds of East Africa* is the more valuable book to take with you. When I go to Kenya and Tanzania later this year, the extra information given by the range maps would prove beneficial (These more detailed range maps will be particularly useful for the first time visitor.), but I am taking *Birds of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi* because of ease of use and higher accuracy of the illustrations.

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