

more supportive of such endeavors (as they help to document species, makes for a better identification, and immediate publication of sightings online).

Anyways, this book is the best field guide for its region and beyond, and leaves a global impact. It's to be placed in your bookshelf and used in the field a lot

for the challenges to come in times of globalization and massive Asian Growth!

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## Birds of East Asia – China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Russia

By M. Brazil. 2009. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey. 528 pages. 39.95 USD, Paper.

This book is a great contribution to the literature of a poorly covered region. It does, however raise some curious questions. The first is the area covered; it ranges from 116°E [just east of Hong Kong] to 165°E [the date line], from 20°N [Taiwan] to 78° N [about level with Grise Fiord]. About 80 per cent of the region selected is in Russia – Siberia and the Russian Far East. This leaves out most of China, but includes all of Taiwan, Korea, Japan [plus a smidgen of Mongolia]. It seems an odd choice to select portions of countries. It does mean that many North American birds are included; those that sneak their range from Alaska into the Russian Far East.

The format is typical of modern field guides; illustrations on the right and text on the left. Range maps are included with the text. In addition to the usual colour representations for summer, winter and permanent ranges, the author has added a pink zone for “scarce”, but scarce is not defined. True vagrants like North American warblers have no map only a range description and rare birds like Siberian Crane [critically endangered – population around 3200.] have regularly coloured maps. Instead scarce is used for birds like the Common Starling which strays to the Chinese coast in winter in small numbers. Despite my confusion this is a useful concept that should be copied by others.

Because of the book's chosen regional boundary, the reader can see 985 species with Great Blue Heron [accidental] and Grey Heron on the same page – a useful juxtaposition. Similarly Redhead, Canvasback and Common and Red-crested Pochard are all on one page. The book includes the Bering Sea alcids and around 30 buntings, some like Yellowhammer as vagrants and eight North American sparrows, again as vagrants [except Savannah Sparrow]. Thirty one gulls are depicted, of which 11 are vagrants, giving a wide coverage in a single book. Travellers will recognise birds from Europe, India, Polynesia, North America, Africa and even Antarctica.

The text, while brief, is clear and makes all the salient points. This includes discussions on the subspecies, especially where there is the likelihood of a split in the future [e.g., Eurasian Blackbird]. However, the author makes some odd statements. For example, under Great Blue Heron it says “some migrating as far as Canada to breed” – does he not know it is common

in much of our country? The voice of the Rusty Black-bird is given as a soft “chuck” not the classic “squeal like the creak of rusty hinges.” Only the calls, not the songs, of the North American warblers are given [which is probably valid for this region]. The Reed Parrotbill is shown as restricted to Eastern China. There is a question mark in Russia, but the bird does occur at Russia's Lake Khanka [north of Vladivostok]. The Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*), is incorrectly called a Lesser Canada Goose and Cackling Goose is identified as *B. h. minima* [correctly it is the Small Cackling Goose, one of the five subspecies of Cackling Goose]. *Branta canadensis* is called the Greater Canada Goose, but of the seven subspecies none are called Greater. Lesser Canada Goose properly denotes the subspecies *parvipes* of the Canada Goose. Recent DNA studies suggest that the Black-eared Kite (*M. m. lineatus*), here separated as *M. lineatus*, is not sufficiently distinctive to be called a separate species. The author includes the Tropical shearwater as a full species. *Puffinus bailloni*, but does not mention Audubon's Shearwater, *Puffinus ilherminieri*. This muddies an already confusing taxonomy. The current status is that the subspecies *Puffinus ilherminieri bailloni* breeds in the Indian Ocean. The subspecies *Puffinus ilherminieri dichrous* in central Polynesia and the Indian Ocean up, while *Puffinus ilherminieri bannermani* breeds on the Ogasawara Islands.

The Eurasian common names are used [diver instead of loon etc.] although some of are a little out of line. For example, Bearded Reedling is listed as Bearded Tit [having been re-displaced from the parrotbills, but not back into the tits.] *Aegyptius monachus* is called the Monk Vulture [a valid but obscure name] rather than Cinerous or Eurasian Black Vulture.

The illustrations have been done by 13 artists so there are some style differences. The quality, however, is consistent and the reader will have no difficulty in the field. Birds like the Greenish Warbler are as good as they can be with such difficult species. Try putting Greenish Warbler in Google Images and comparing the photos with the illustrations. There are birds that are browner, with more or less prominent wing and eye stripes establishing how difficult it is to depict *Phylloscopus* warblers such as this one. The same can be said of the *Gallinago* snipes. The one place I did blink was the depiction of the 43 cm Little Bustard

and the 23 cm Slaty-legged Crake as being the same size. All the other plates are in proportion.

I was a little disappointed that the author did not put Vega and American Herring Gull on same page so the reader could make a more direct comparison. In general I found the colours accurate. The Wood Swallow is perhaps a little too dark and the female Barrow's Goldeneye's bill should be more yellow.

Despite some irritating points of confusion, I think it is an important and valuable addition to the world's field guides. It is a vast improvement over the 1984 *Birds of the USSR* by Flint, Boehme, Kostin and Kuz-

netsov [Princeton] as well as the dated Korean and Taiwanese English-language guides. This guide's main rival is *Birds of Europe, Russia, China and Japan: Passerines*, by Norman Arlott [Princeton], but this covers fewer genera and is less detailed with twice as many birds per page. Brazil's book adds significantly to the coverage by modern field guides and it will be a useful field book for residents [who read English] and visitors alike.

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### **Birds of the Horn of Africa – Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Socotra**

By Nigel Redman, Terry Stevenson, and John Fanshawe. 2009. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey. 488 pages. 40.00 USD Paper.

This book covers the volatile countries of northeast Africa; Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia plus the islands of Socotra. Socotra is a part of the Republic of Yemen and is a group of four islands off the coast of the Horn 350 km south of the Arabian peninsula. It has well over 250 Socotran plant species of are found nowhere else. This includes the dragon's blood tree whose red sap was sold as dragon's blood. There are also several endemic birds, [Socotra Starling, Socotra Sunbird, Socotra Sparrow and Socotra Grosbeak ]

The book follows the currently-used format for field guides. It covers over 1000 species and is fully illustrated. As soon as I opened the book I recognised some of the artwork. It is taken from Stevenson and Fanshawe's earlier book, *The Birds of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi* (2006) [reviewed in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* 120(1): 113]. I liked the high quality of these illustrations by John Gale and Brian Small then, and I still do now. They have proven to be of great value in the field as my now wrinkled *Birds of East Africa* will attest.

The range maps show the distributions as different colours and shading [resident, visitor, etc.] and they also have the highlands and major rivers. While this is useful, it is a little more difficult to read, especially for birds of limited distribution [e.g., the African Crake]. For the most part, I like this addition. Certainly it is clear that the highlands are more species-rich than the coastal lowlands.

Although we usually identify new birds using the illustrations, it is often the text that clinches the decision. The text in this book provides valuable insights into all species, but is a particular help in separating difficult, look-alike species. This is very important for birds like larks and pipits, even more so when dealing with endemics like Archer's Lark. The authors carefully evaluate the likely subspecies that might be present so they can accurately assess the differences between similar species.

The thousand plus birds covered include all the single specimen records, even those washed up dead on the beach. The authors list dubious and unaccepted sightings as well. All birds, even the vagrants, are given full coverage – complete illustrations and text. Despite this large number of species the book is not oversized, it will still fit in your pack.

Now comes the critical question; Who is the intended audience? There are tours advertised for this area and some British companies have regular trips to Ethiopia, despite their Foreign and Commonwealth Office advising against ALL travel. There are travel advisories from U.S. and Canada too. Ethiopia has suffered drought, famine, war, and bad governance. A 31-year war gained independence for Eritrea in 1993, but this led to border war. Somalia [and the unrecognized Republic of Somaliland.] does not have an effective government and has had years of fighting between rival warlords. As well, fighting has occurred between Islamist fighters and the interim government. Poverty has spawned pirates and illegally dumped nuclear and toxic waste. Djibouti was ravaged by a civil war until 2000. This is not a comforting situation for the prospective traveller. You will have to be more than a little adventurous. There are wildlife groups in Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen. Yet with average incomes around a few hundred dollars a year, I do not see a large local market.

It is sad to reflect on this poor political situation is stopping the flow of ecotourists with their much needed cash, because now there is a top quality field-guide to the birds of this diverse region. In addition to the 61 endemics and 17 near-endemics [tabulated at the rear of the book] you can look for most of the birds from the south [Kenya], from the north [Egypt] as well as Eurasian migrants. A well-organized trip of two weeks will net you 500 or more species. This is a good book and more important, it is a landmark book — covering a long-neglected area. I hope it does well.

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