

Handbook of Birds of the World: Volume 9 Cotingas to Pipits and Wagtails

Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and David Christie.
2004. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. 850 pages, illustrated. Cloth \$195 US.

This volume of the *Handbook of Birds of the World* covers 819 species, including Cotingas, Manakins, Tyrant-flycatchers (over 50 % of the book), New Zealand Wrens, Scrub-birds, Lyrebirds, Larks, Swallows and Martins and Pipits and Wagtails. With the publication of this volume *Handbook* has now covered 60% of the world's 197 families of birds. Under the current schedule Volume 10 will be published in 2005 and the final volume, 16, is due in 2011.

It has become very difficult to review these books. Most reviewers, including myself, have already praised the content, the artwork, the scholarship, the format and so on. The quality of all aspects has been remarkably consistent. This volume is no different and it is equivalent to the other volumes.

Volume 9 opens with an essay on ornithological nomenclature by Richard Banks. This is a description of the history, the rules of nomenclature and some of the pitfalls. The author has tabulated some of the most frequently used species names (*cinereus* and its variants is the most used). He also notes that after Linnaeus, the originator of the nomenclature system, Philip Lutley Sclater, a British bio-geographer and taxonomist, has officially named the most birds.

This is a timely essay for Volume 9 because it precedes an unusual situation. Research has shown that a proposed sub-division of the Tyrannidae had not been formally recognized. Therefore the editors published a description of the proposed tribe as required by international protocol. While HBOW is a little different than the usual scientific journal, there is no reason why it should not publish this text.

The breadth of coverage starts with the wildly coloured and sometimes oddball Cotingas, not just the dazzling Cock-of-the-Rock but the bellbirds and umbrellabirds too. The manakins are smaller but also brilliant. I remember stopping dead at the sight of a Red-capped Manakin and being so transfixed I almost missed a much rarer flycatcher; the Sulphur-rumped. But in this edition the flashy birds are overshadowed by the "little brown jobs - LBJs." Just under half of the 429 Tyrannids are olive-grey-brown. Most of the larks and pipits are LBJs too. In fact, about 75% of the species in this volume fall into this category. This includes the dozen or so notorious Empidonax flycatchers and the two dozen tropical Elaenias. To separate these birds you

need a good view plus either their song or geographical location to stand a chance at identification. Earlier this year, a colleague and I spent 15 minutes studying a close and very still (it was drizzling) Mountain Elaenia before we were satisfied with its identity.

Even when the Tyrannid is brightly coloured with a yellow underside and a black-and-white striped head, then you have 14 look-alikes to contend with. Again geography helps but separating Social and Lesser Kiskadee flycatchers can be tricky.

One of the qualities I have learnt to appreciate more and more about HBOW is the perspective I get by having the entire world taxonomy and distribution at my fingertips. For example, when I encountered a new species, one of the eight African longclaws (in *Macronyx*) I was able to read about their relationship with other pipits. This despite my tendency to regard them as little meadowlarks (of the purely America *Sturnella*), from their appearance and habits. HBOW brings a focus to the biogeography and family ties to these widespread families.

This access to worldwide taxonomy also raises questions. How can the Temminck's (Horned) Lark of northern North Africa be a different species from the Horned Lark of Europe and North America? The variation in plumage of the latter easily overlaps the paleness of the former (especially *Eromophila alpestris bicornis*, *E.p. brandti* and *E.p. teleschowii*). Indeed, some years ago, I saw a Horned Lark in Manitoba that was remarkably pale and very close to Temminck's Lark. I have never doubted it was nothing more than a pale version of our common Horned Lark. So I wonder why is Temminck's separate from the Horned Lark, which in turn is split into 42 subspecies? I look forward to Volume 10 to see how the authors handle the stonechats, in particular the very distinctive Madagascan Stonechat.

The editors are continuing to maintain their uniform, high standard and have settled in to a one-year production. In this volume they have made another useful change. Previously the plates identified the species by a number only. You needed to turn to the text to match the number with a name. The names of all the species depicted on a plate are now given along with the species number in a footnote opposite the plate.

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British Columbia: A Natural History. Revised and Updated

Richard Cannings, and Sydney Cannings. 2004. Greystone Books, Douglas and McIntyre, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. 341 pages, 209 figures. \$39.95.

This paperback reprint is a gem. As the title indicates, it is a revised and updated version of a hardcover book

first published in 1996, which won the Bill Duthie Bookseller's Choice Award for the "best work published in British Columbia" that year, "The Lieutenant-Governor's Award for Historical Writing in British Columbia," and the Science in Society Award of the