

## Birds of Madagascar

By Pete Morris and Frank Hawkins. 1998. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut. 316 pp., illus. U.S. \$35.

This is a no-nonsense bird book. With little preamble, it concentrates on depicting and describing the birds of Madagascar. Indeed, virtually all the book is devoted to the main topic. There is an introduction to habitat types and the distribution and conservation of birds and bird watching sites. While brief, these sections do impart the critical information needed. I was mildly surprised when the authors used almost three pages on the widely-available depictions of bird topography!

The remainder of the book is in standard field guide style. There is a description of two species on the left page and illustrations on the right. This is almost exclusively a photographic guide. The authors write that they chose photographs that portray the key features needed for field recognition. While this is generally true, there are some exceptions. There are nine additional, appealing paintings by Mark Andrews. For seven species, mostly rare endemics, this is the sole portrayal of the birds. For several other species (notably Rand's Warbler, Grey Emutail, Brown-throated Sand Martin, African Black Swift, Madagascar Spinetail, Madagascar Snipe, and Bat Hawk) the photographs are really too poor to be of use in identification. In other cases, while the photograph is good, a key component is obscure. For example, the crest on the Madagascar Cuckoo Hawk is not visible. In these cases there are no fill-in illustrations by an artist and this is unfortunate. Of the seven species quoted above, four are endemic. The three species to be found in nearby Africa are represented in some of the African texts.

English bird names in Africa can be variable and confusing. It took me a little while to realize the authors had split the Yellow-billed Kite from the Black Kite as a full species. I noted that they had moved the Thick-billed Cuckoo back to *Cuculus* from *Pachycoccyx*. Generally though, I had little difficulty associating a "Madagascar" name with those used elsewhere in Africa.

The descriptions are short but clear, and should allow for the confirmation of identification. I do not believe I could separate the endemic subspecies for such birds as Hoopoe and White-eye with the limited information given (except that they are on Madagascar). Extreme rarities, most of which are oceanic wanderers, are handled in appendices at the end of the book.

I have pointed out a few shortcomings of this book. It is important to remember that most of the 265 species covered have good photographs and are well described. I was impressed with the number of good flight photographs for most of the larger birds and some of the smaller ones. Virtually all photographs are of birds in the wild, only a few are hand-held banding specimens. Some of the photographs of more highly coloured species are quite superb. The visitor to Madagascar would find this a most useful book. The Malagasy birding community must be happy with this contribution to their culture. So, this leaves me with one last question. If the adjective from Madagascar is Malagasy, why are the birds called Madagascar Ibis, etc. and not Malagasy Ibis, etc.?

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## A Field Guide to the Birds of Gambia and Senegal

By Clive Barlow and Tim Wacher. 1997. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut. 400 pp., illus. U.S. \$40.

Gambia is a small English-speaking country of 11 000 sq. km and a population of one million. The closest comparison in Canada is PEI, which has 5 600 sq. km and 126 000 people (Nova Scotia is 55 000 sq. km). Senegal is a French-speaking country of 196 000 sq. km with a population of 8 million. Despite its small size Gambia has a rich avifauna, which it shares with Senegal.

This book is a fine new guide to this region. However, do not be misled by the title. This is much more of a Gambian guide than one for Senegal. Of the birds not illustrated (mostly rarities) a disproportionate number are from Senegal. In giving informa-

tion on status or distribution there is more detail on Gambian birds. That said, remember Gambia extends like a crooked finger into the heart of Senegal and, in general, both countries share the same species.

The introduction covers the basics of geography, climate, and vegetation for both countries. However, there is more information on the Gambia River flood plain than the drier rolling hills of Senegal. The author includes a listing of the nature parks and reserves.

The book's 48 colour plates are collected into one section. The artist, Tony Disley, has done an excellent job. The shape of each species is realistic and the colours are accurate. I was especially pleased that Disley depicted the correct sub-species wherever





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