regional atlases, and in some cases, updated avifaunas. Our current winner is no exception. Several county atlases have already appeared, but many more are still to come (see BTO News 309: 12–14). A number had been reviewed in 2014 and so were eligible for this award; we felt, however, that it does not do justice to the genre if only those eligible are considered in any given year and have to take their chances against books from many other fields. We have accordingly decided to defer a more systematic consideration of all such atlases and avifaunas until a majority of them have been published, at which point we propose to make an award specifically for this group.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the BTO for making facilities available for judging at Swanwick, and especially to Carole Showell for sourcing books from the Chris Mead Library at Thetford.

Peter Wilkinson, Ian Carter, Peter Hearn, John Marchant, Robin Prytherch and Roger Riddington, c/o BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU

Reviews

The Birds of Ghana

By Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire and Robert J. Dowsett

Tauraco Press, 2014

Pbk, 713pp; 21 plates with colour photos, c. 700 colour distribution maps

ISBN 978-2-87225-007-3 Subbuteo code 2250073

£34.99 BB Bookshop price £31.50

Being about the same size as the UK, Ghana is one of the most accessible countries in West Africa and (apart from a few inter-ethnic scuffles and land disputes in the far north) it is a relatively calm and safe destination. In a survey five years ago only 5% of travelling birders had visited Ghana, but a combination of the excellent Birds of Ghana (Borrow & Demey 2010) and competitively priced birding tours has made Ghana the fastest-growing bird-tourism destination in West Africa – despite the fact that none of the species present are endemic. However, the attraction has to be all but four of the Upper Guinea endemics that are found from here and farther west, plus 179 Guineo-Congolian forest species.

Despite being a great birding destination, Ghana is not immune to the threats that occur in much of Africa. In the last 100 years, six species of birds have ceased to occur in the country, and several others are now seriously threatened. In fact 49 species are considered to be of global or regional conservation concern, and on a recent visit I personally witnessed the way that some natural habitats are being decimated at an alarming rate.

Anyone who has used the Dowsetts’ other publications, covering Malawi and Zambia, will know what to expect, as they combine their own original research with the records of local and visiting ornithologists. They are nothing if not thorough and as an ornithological duo they achieve more in just a few years than some bird clubs manage to do over several generations! An initial 116-page introductory section includes chapters that review the vegetation and major bird habitats, biogeography, migration, conservation challenges and the history of ornithological exploration in Ghana. The main part of the book describes the status of 750 species, including around 100 that spend the northern winter in the country, and a further 50 or so that occur on passage or as vagrants.

The main attraction will be the maps, which clearly display the distribution of each species.
There are 196 countries around the world, and over half of them have chosen a 'national bird' at some point. This book takes 99 of these countries and reveals the bird selected by each nation. The text describes the species, its lifestyle, how it was chosen and, importantly, where to see it. The last aspect is fine for birds like the African Fish Eagle Haliaeetus vocifer, chosen by Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. However, the national bird of Belgium and France is the 'Gallic Rooster' – or Red Junglefowl Gallus gallus, and you are most likely to see one of those strung up in a butcher’s shop!

Each species is richly illustrated with photos, including shots of the ephemera that indicate the selection – such as coins, stamps and national flags. Some choices are blindingly obvious, such as the Emu Dromaius novaehollandiae for Australia and the kiwi Apteryx for New Zealand. But there are odd examples in amongst the choices. Liberia did not choose the Liberian Greenbul Phyllastrephus leucolepis (a species that was both found and lost in 1985), but instead decided on the Common Bulbul Pycnonotus barbatus – a bird that most birders would choose to forget!

Actually, I do think that national birds should be for the enjoyment of the nation’s people, so it is best to select a bird that they know already. Burma was brave in choosing the Grey Peacock-pheasant Polyplectron bicalcaratum – a bird that many of us would like to see if only it would reveal itself! Although you still have more chances of seeing that than the Dodo Raphus cucullatus – the national bird of Mauritius, last seen in 1662.

This book will be interesting to a wide audience since it focuses not just on the birds, but also on their cultural presence both today and in history. There is also a section of emblem miscellany with little-known facts about the national birds and those others that are featured in the country’s historical documents but were never awarded the title of ‘national bird’.

Keith Betton
Reviews

Latin for Bird Lovers
By Roger Lederer and Carol Burr
Timber Press, 2014
Hbk, 224pp; numerous colour illustrations
£14.99  BB Bookshop price £13.50

Have you ever paused to wonder about the scientific names of birds, how they were arrived at, by whom and exactly what they mean? Well here is an opportunity to learn more with this superbly produced book, packed with illustrations (and modestly priced, by modern standards). The main part is devoted to the scientific names, over 3,000, commencing with Aalge – Ål-jee ‘a type of auk, from the Danish, as in Uria aalge, the Common Murre or Guillemot. The concluding entry is Zosterops – Zos-ter-ops ‘Greek, zoster. Girdle, and ops, appearance, as in Zosterops sengalesis, the African Yellow White-eye’. Supporting the alphabetical entries are a series of informative texts including biographies of famous birders, such as John Gould and David Lack. There are genus profiles, bird themes ranging from avian adaptations to foraging, and short paragraphs headed ‘Latin in Action’.

The authors, Roger Lederer (who maintains the website ornithology.com) and Carol Burr (an author, editor and artist), have produced a book to savour, with a new discovery on each page. It will provide unlimited pleasure and a wonderful source for those tasked with setting questions at members’ evenings at the local bird club. Indeed, no birdwatcher should be without a copy.

David Saunders

A Feathered River Across the Sky
By Joel Greenberg
Bloomsbury, 2014
Hbk, 289pp; colour and black-and-white illustrations
£18.99  BB Bookshop price £17.00

When Europeans arrived in North America, 25–40% of the continent’s birds were Passenger Pigeons Ectopistes migratorius, travelling in flocks so massive as to block out the sun for hours or even days. It is small wonder no-one considered that by the early years of the twentieth century such a bird could become extinct.

Joel Greenberg was mesmerised by the Passenger Pigeon story as a schoolboy. Now, his fine book chronicles the whole desperate, incredible story of how such an abundant bird, a single flock of which in 1860 exceeded a billion birds, became extinct in little over 40 years. He brings together numerous and compelling eyewitness accounts of the slaughter. The last Passenger Pigeon in the wild has long been accepted as that shot by a boy on 24th March 1900 in Ohio (‘Buttons’, as the specimen became known, because buttons were used for the eyes), but Greenberg discovered two subsequent records of wild birds. One shot in Illinois on 12th March 1901 is fortuitously conserved at Millikin University. Just over a year later, another, one of two birds well documented, being described as ‘a beautiful male’, was killed near Laurel, Franklin County, Indiana. It was acquired from the young man who had shot it by a pharmacist, Charles Muchmore, ‘for a week’s supply of tobacco trade’.

Great efforts were made, rumours circulated, searches instituted, rewards offered, but no more Passenger Pigeons were found in the wild. Those in zoological collections refused to breed and dwindled in number. One bird in particular stood out – ‘Martha’ in Cincinnati Zoological Gardens. After her death on 1st September 1914, her frozen body was despatched on a three-day journey to the Smithsonian, where she resides to this day, last of a once-mighty race.

David Saunders

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www.wildlifebooks.com/bb
This is a list of the bird species recorded in Ghana. The avifauna of Ghana include a total of 749 confirmed species, of which 64 are accidental. An additional two species are considered "uncertain" (see below) and are not included in the count. None are endemic. This list's taxonomic treatment (designation and sequence of orders, families, and species) and nomenclature (common and scientific names) follow the conventions of The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World, 2017 edition.[1] Unless otherwise noted, the list is that of the African Bird Club's (ABC) Checklist of the... This is a list of the bird species recorded in Ghana. The avifauna of Ghana included a total of 773 confirmed species as of February 2020. Of them, 64 are accidental and two have been introduced by humans. None are endemic. Unless otherwise noted, the list is that of iGoTerra. This list's taxonomic treatment (designation and sequence of orders, families, and species) and nomenclature (English and scientific names) are those of The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World, 2019 edition. The following The avifauna of Ghana includes a total of 754 species, of which 6 are rare or accidental. This list's taxonomic treatment (designation and sequence of orders, families, and species) and nomenclature (English and scientific names) follow the conventions of Clements's 5th edition. The family accounts at the beginning of each heading reflects this taxonomy, as do the species counts found in each family account. Accidental species are included in the total species counts for Ghana. Birds of Ghana coded for abundance, breeding, migration, wintering, endemic, rare, etc. 2000 pages on birds, nature, birdwatching, where to go birding, birds and nature pictures, nature conservation, equipment, bird feeding, etc. Welcome to the bird list of Ghana. Among the species of the Check list of the birds of Ghana you can find waterfowl and wading birds, a large suite of song birds, raptors, game birds, swifts and nighthawks, etc., many of which occupy several ecosystems simultaneously, as they fly to and from forests, meadows, shorelines of waters, cities and urban green spaces. At Birdlist, we have developed a coding system that can help you predict when you may expect a certain species, with a code for seasonality, such as resident, nesting, wintering, etc.