



EDITED BY ROBERT M. ZINK

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On the Biology of Five Species of Swifts (Apodidae, Cypseloidinae) in Costa Rica.—Manuel Marin A. and F. Gary Stiles. 1992. Proceedings of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology. Vol. 4, No. 5: 287–351. 2 color plates, 37 figures, 13 tables. \$15.00.—Based on data collected over three breeding seasons at sites in central Costa Rica, the authors provide detailed descriptions of nesting behavior including information on nest placement, nest structure, clutch size, incubation, nestling growth rates, and adult molt for four members of the Cypseloidinae. They also present morphologic data for these species and a fifth (Black Swift, *Cypseloides niger*; data come from California). Findings are discussed in relation to interspecific differences in foraging ecology. The authors' interesting taxonomic conclusions for the group would benefit from more rigorous phylogenetic analysis. The subfamily is known from fossils in France that date to the Lower Miocene (C. T. Collins, *Smithson. Contrib. Paleobiol.* 27:129–132, 1976), and lineages could be quite old. The text figures include 17 photographs of nest sites, nestlings, and adults. Also included are seven line drawings of various aspects of swift behavior by J. Schmitt, who painted the two color plates, as well. The artwork is well executed and the monograph is well written, presenting useful data on a poorly known group of birds. This monograph will be of interest to many Neotropical biologists; I would especially recommend it to anyone studying comparative breeding biology.—JOHN M. BATES, *Department of Ornithology, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th, New York, New York 10024, USA.*

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The Ecology and Conservation of the Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*).—Adam Gretton. 1991. International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge, United Kingdom. x + 159 pp., 9 tables (+ 3 appendices), 17 black-and-white photographs, 9 graphs, 13 maps, 1 line drawing. ISBN 0-946888-22-1. Paper, £8.00 (\$10.95 U.S.).—The title of this book is misleading; so little is known about the ecology of the Slender-billed Curlew (the last nest

was found in 1925, and information on foraging behavior is based on observations of three overwintering birds in Morocco) that the development of conservation plans seems rudimentary. Perhaps a better title would be *Search for the Slender-billed Curlew*, for this little book reads more like a detective story than a manual on conservation strategies. The story unveils the search for information on one of the rarest birds in the western Palearctic. The estimated population of Slender-billed Curlews is not only small (less than 400 individuals), but it breeds in and migrates over remote areas inhabited by few people—including ornithologists. The problems of assessing the status of this species are addressed by some fascinating sleuthing by Adam Gretton and the International Council for Bird Preservation. The book represents a massive effort over a period of two years to compile all published and unpublished information about this species. A database was developed using information gleaned from an international network of ornithologists and conservationists. This book gives a detailed account of the results of their search for records and includes many fascinating historical and anecdotal descriptions of curlew sightings.

The suggested causes of population decline seem somewhat speculative because of the paucity of information on the life history of this species. There is an emphasis on hunting as a major and continuing cause of decline, which is based on scanty records and the fact that 15 birds were known to be killed since 1960. Even so, a major focus on hunting regulations remains throughout discussions of conservation strategies. Although habitat loss along migration routes is suggested as an important cause of population decline, there is little discussion of habitat enhancement, restoration, and preservation. However, the Slender-billed Curlew Action Plan, which was developed as part of this research, includes recommendations for the preservation and protection of key wetlands that would also benefit a diversity of other species.

The production of the book itself is of mixed quality. The worst aspect of the book's production is the poor quality of the maps of Slender-billed Curlew sightings, which appear to be crude, computer-generated line drawings. None of the maps are labeled (names of countries, major cities, bodies of water, and landmarks are not included), which in some cases makes interpretation almost impossible. This can be particularly difficult for eastern European and Mediterranean locations (e.g. Turkey, Romania, Yugoslavia, Tunisia) that are not familiar to many westerners. In addition, curlew locations are marked by symbols

representing numbers of records that are difficult to interpret, key sites are listed in the text but are not identified on the maps, and no information is given on the associated habitats of these sightings. At first glance, the photographs also appear to be of low quality (Plate #3 is an example of "find the three Slender-billed Curlews in this picture") until one recognizes that they may represent the few known photographs of the species! The photographs of curlew habitat would be more useful if they were in color or had higher contrast; descriptions of plant communities would have been helpful.

Overall, I found this book to be intriguing, but I could not help feeling that its publication was premature. The material covered represents the initial results of ongoing research, and I was left wondering what has happened since 1990. The combination of the sheer rarity of historical and recent records of Slender-billed Curlews and the process that the author went through to gain access to them jolts one into realizing that there remain migratory species of birds that we know very little about, even in this age of technology and information. This book would be a useful addition to university libraries and museum collections, and its modest price makes it affordable for anyone interested in rare species, historical accounts, or international conservation efforts.—ABBY N. POWELL, *National Biological Survey, Department of Biology, San Diego State University, San Diego, California 92182, USA.*

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Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa. Sixth edition—Gordon L. Maclean. 1993. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, South Africa. lxxx + 617 pp., 13 text figures, about 900 distribution maps, and 80 colored plates, those of birds by Kenneth Newman and Geoff Lockwood, ISBN 0-620-17583-4. Cloth, R 69.99 (U.S. \$20.50).—Roberts' *Birds of Southern Africa* in its various editions has been the standard bird handbook for southern Africa since 1940. As a handbook it has no competitor and undoubtedly it will continue to be the standard work for years to come. The cover of the new edition is beautifully simple and impressive and promises great things, and the dustjacket announces that the text of the previous edition has been "completely revised" and is "up to date to the end of January 1992." However, close inspection of the literature since the last edition (see review by Fraser and Brooke, *Birding in Southern Africa* 45:127–128, 1993) indicates that the information bedecking these flimsy pages is not as up to date as the publishers claim. Indeed, Roberts' sixth edition is printed on light-

weight paper and, not only does the printing on the back of the page show through, so does the printing on the page after that. The choice of paper may have been made to keep the retail price down, but I am sure most people would have been prepared to pay a little extra for the benefit of only reading one page at a time!

Roberts' fourth was the last edition to contain descriptions of subspecies. In view of recent advances (e.g. based on a combination of molecular, morphological, and behavioral information) made in the detection of borderline and cryptic species (many of which were described as subspecies in earlier editions), this important component of earlier editions should have been reinstated. The new "splits" recognized over the last few years and published in the *Second Updating Report: S.A.O.S. Checklist of Southern African Birds* (1991) have not been dealt with adequately in the book being reviewed. The split of the Karoo Korhaan (*Eupodotis vigorsii*) was implemented in the fifth edition, presumably because the author was already convinced that Rüppell's Korhaan (*E. rueppellii*) was a discrete species. The splits of the Black Korhaan (*E. afra*), Knysna Lourie (*Tauraco corythaix*) and Bleating Warbler (*Camaroptera brachyura*) are not mentioned at all in this latest edition. Burchell's Coucal (*Centropus burchellii* Swainson, 1837) has been recognized nominally, but the White-browed Coucal (*C. superciliosus* Hemprich & Ehrenberg, 1833) is still included. The Saffron-breasted Prinia (*Prinia hypoxantha* [Sharpe], 1877) has been recognized in Latin but not in English, and the account includes the Spotted Prinia (*P. maculosa* [Boddaert], 1783). None of these "new" species have been ascribed new "Roberts' numbers." This highlights the inadequacy of the numbering system.

Roberts' is not intended as a field guide, which is just as well because the quality of the plates is too variable and, in general, very little age-, sex-, and geographically-based variation is illustrated. Some old plates have been enlarged (to what end I am not sure) such that portions of birds run off the page or disappear into the binding, and plate numbers are all over the place on the page. The new plates at the end of the plate section are poor and provide little evidence that the artist is familiar with the species involved. For example, the Laysan Albatross (*Diomedea immutabilis*) is the only small albatross recorded in the region whose feet project beyond the tail tip in flight. In the illustration the feet do not even reach the tip of the undertail coverts, never mind the tail. This feature is not mentioned in the text either. The new seabird plate in general is hopelessly overcrowded, and the birds are not to scale. The albatrosses have bills like pigeons and the storm-petrels look like cardboard mobiles—I could go on.

The distribution maps generally are clear, but the use of a pale yellow color for nonbreeding visitors can prove difficult to read when the distributions are

very limited. Amazingly, some of the old distributional "chestnuts" are still perpetuated. Both the text and the map still show Pink-backed Pelicans (*Pelecanus rufescens*) as resident and breeding in the southern and southwestern Cape. This 19th-century error was cleared out of the literature years ago, but still persists in this volume. Where the evidence for a continuous distribution of Sand Plovers (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) along the Namibian coast comes from is a mystery to me. The erroneous distribution map for Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) in the fifth edition has been corrected, but the corrected distribution map for the Blue Crane (*Anthropoides paradiseus*) is now wrong. The map for this species links Etosha and Makgadikgadi Pans—there is one record of vagrancy at the latter site. Although the publishers indicate in the preface that cognizance has been taken of information in the data bases of the *Southern African Bird Atlas Project*, these errors and others (see abovementioned review by Fraser and Brooke) suggest that this resource was not exploited fully.

The text does contain some new information (e.g. Shoebill, *Balaeniceps rex*; only about 54% of plunges are successful), and has also retained some questionable information (e.g. group size and seasonality of Ross's Lourie [*Musophaga rossae*]; how could this information come from southern Africa?). Several new sonograms have been added, but these have not been enhanced, and many look very messy (e.g. Blue Swallow [*Hirundo atrocaerulea*], Northern Grey Tit [*Parus griseiventris*], Carp's Black Tit [*P. carpi*]); they are presented quite differently to the sonograms carried over from the fifth edition.

New species have been added at the end of the text and not put in their correct taxonomic position. The introduction to this section states "The species of birds in the following accounts have been added since the preparation of the manuscript for the revised (5th) edition of Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa." In fact, four of them (Mountain Pipit [*Anthus hoeschi*], Lesser Yellowlegs [*Tringa flavipes*], Red-throated Pipit [*Anthus cervinus*] and Red-rumped Swallow [*Hirundo daurica*]) were in the fifth edition and, what's more, were in the correct taxonomic order.

The identification keys have all been moved to the front of the book. Although the concept of such keys is excellent, care must be taken while using them. For example, the key to the scolopacid waders contains only 71% of the region's species. It includes a couple of super-rarities such as Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*) and Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemasticta*), but excludes two fairly common species (Ruddy Turnstone [*Arenaria interpres*] and Grey Phalarope [Red Phalarope in North American usage; *Phalaropus fulicaria*]), as well as a eight other species.

The most commonly used index (English) is not the easiest to find, being neither at the beginning nor end of the no-less-than 13 indexes. A problem for nonsouthern African workers is the retrograde choice

of English names; the author assumes that southern Africa can divorce itself from English-language traditions in other parts of the world, including east Africa. Except for the Ruddy Turnstone, the English names used by the author have been used in this review.

Roberts' is a book that all ornithologists/birdwatchers with an interest in southern African birds should own; there is no single-volume substitute. The lack of an alternative means that the book is targeted at a captive audience. Although it is eight years since the publication of the fifth edition, the amount of revision that has been done for this new edition is not great. If you have copies of the fourth or fifth edition on your shelf, you will probably feel obliged to update your reference collection with the sixth edition. Bite the bullet, but prepare yourself in advance for a disappointment.—TIMOTHY M. CROWE, *Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700 South Africa.*

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The Birds of Pakistan. Volume 2. Passeriformes.—Thomas J. Roberts. 1992. Oxford University Press, Karachi, Pakistan. xxxv + 617 pp., 24 colored plates by author, 284 distribution maps, ISBN 0-19-577405-1. Cloth \$85.00.—Volume 1 was published in 1991 and contains the introductory matter and nonpasserine accounts. It was reviewed in 1992 (*Auk* 109:695–696) by Bruce M. Beehler. Volume 2 has appeared only a year later. We congratulate the author on achieving this too rare result. We endorse Beehler's comments in his review and wish to emphasize that this work is a major contribution to the knowledge of the birds in a country often visited, and which extends across two biogeographical regions, the Palearctic in the north and west and the Indomalaysian in the center, south, and east. It is based on over 30 years residence and travel in Pakistan and relies heavily on the author's personal observations. This is an agreeable feature in a period when so many writers of bird books are content to paraphrase the works of their predecessors.

The species accounts normally contain the following headings: description; habitat, distribution, and status; habits; breeding biology; vocalizations. A few have an initial heading, "taxonomy," in which points of interest to the author are discussed and which draw the attention of students to work still required. The author confuses the terms race and sub-species [sic] which are synonyms, and species and superspecies; however, no specialist would be confused by his terminology because he gives enough facts and names to make clear what he really wants to say.

Among the passerines an additional heading "human exploitation" has been included for the Indian Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*). A map is provided for all species regularly occurring in Pakistan and clearly shows year-round residence, breeding residence, and wintering areas as appropriate. The only map that we found difficult to interpret is the one for the Eastern Pied Wheatear (*Oenanthe picata*), depicting three forms with largely, but not completely different ranges. A map is omitted for birds whose status is given as "rare vagrant." In such cases the few records known are listed individually. Species that have been claimed for Pakistan in the past, but for which the evidence of occurrence is inadequate, are mentioned briefly in the taxonomic sequence, and the reason(s) for rejection given.

The author makes clear what data are his own and, in an abbreviated but practical way, what comes from the literature. As far as we can tell, the coverage of the literature on birds in Pakistan is very good, and the author is not afraid to use that of the 19th century. Unfortunately, many critical records are based on the work of Richard Meinertzhagen. Where these are unsupported by later work, they must be regarded as doubtful (Knox, *Ibis* 135:320-325, 1993). It really is a great shame that Meinertzhagen has been shown to be untrustworthy and more than capable of giving fictitious localities for his specimens and observations, since he did much exploratory work, particularly in the Afrotropical and Palearctic regions.

The book provides much material for thought. For instance, why does the widespread Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*) not breed on houses in Pakistan, whereas this is commonplace in tropical Africa (*Birds of Africa* 4:179, 1992)? Why do Common or Barn Swallows (*H. rustica*) roost gregariously on telephone lines in tropical Asia but not in Africa (*Birds of Africa* 4: 191-192, 1992)?

The book, although not perfect—has too many typographical errors—is an essential guide to the distribution and behavior (including breeding and nest architecture) of birds occurring in Pakistan, and provides a most important update on the biology of birds of part of the Indian Peninsula, an area that largely has escaped the attentions of students of living birds from 1950 onwards.—RICHARD K. BROOKE AND TIMOTHY M. CROWE, *Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700 South Africa.*

by William Zimmerman. 1992. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana. 270 pp., 25 color plates, 25 maps. ISBN 0-253-31160-8. Cloth, \$29.95—Indiana University Press and wildlife artist William Zimmerman have teamed up to re-publish Arthur Cleveland Bent's *Life Histories of North American Birds*. *Woodpeckers* is the first volume in what promises to be the first properly designed and professionally illustrated edition of Bent's *Life Histories*.

The book's text has not been changed from the original series; the format is virtually the same aside from the book's larger size of 8¼ × 10¾". A Foreword, an Acknowledgments section by William Zimmerman, a List of Plates, and 25 full-page color plates have been added. Also new are range maps, the currently recognized English and scientific names, and each species' length (in inches), which are inserted in the page margin at the beginning of each species account.

The plates are attractive and the backgrounds, apparently inspired by Bent's writings, are illustrative of a section of each species' environment. I especially liked the pair of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers at the nest hole, bracketed by flowering cross vine (Plate 14) and the female "Harris's" Woodpecker perched beneath a damp moss-covered limb (Plate 17). Although the postures of Zimmerman's woodpeckers are somewhat rigid, the paintings show remarkable detail and impart a certain romance. Most plates illustrate only definitive male and female plumages, but four plates also illustrate juvenal-plumaged birds (referred to as immatures).

Indiana Press and William Zimmerman have opted not to update Bent's text. This decision was made apparently to maintain the historic continuity of the series. Certainly, the production of an updated volume would have been a great undertaking and more-current information is already or soon will be available (e.g. L. L. Short's excellent monograph *Woodpeckers of the World* [1982]; within the next 5-10 years, the ANSP and AOU's Birds of North America Project species accounts should contain the most current information). The organization of the new *Woodpeckers* has been somewhat modified from the original. The plates, grouped in three sections within the book, are arranged following current taxonomy and nomenclature. Personally, I would have preferred that each plate be inserted at the beginning of each species account and that each species be identified using Bent's taxonomy, further preserving the historical continuity of the work.

A facing page, opposite most plates, lists not only the currently recognized common and scientific names for each species, but also the corresponding "historic" names used in the text, many of which pertain to named subspecies. Certain illustrations are credited on the facing page as being representative of a group of subspecies but, unfortunately, several misleading errors slipped by the editors. For example, Plate 16,

which depicts Hairy Woodpeckers that appear to be typical of eastern subspecies, is incorrectly indicated as also representing seven western subspecies (including northwestern coastal, Rocky Mountain, and southwestern subspecies), whereas the description of Plate 17, which accurately depicts the coastal northwestern Hairy "Harris's" Woodpecker ("*Dryobates villosus harrisi/hyloscopus*"), does not list the superficially similar subspecies *picoideus* and *sitkensis*. Zimmerman apparently works from specimens so, hopefully, the subspecific identities of his models will be noted on future plates and greater attention given to the range of geographic variation.

The range maps are small, show little detail and, in my opinion, do little to enhance the text. The maps would be much more interesting if they were larger, more detailed, and depicted the ranges of Bent's different subspecies. Plenty of space for such improved maps is available on the mostly blank facing pages for the plates.

Woodpeckers is nonetheless an attractive remake of a classic reference on North American birds and should, as Zimmerman hopes, introduce new or reacquaint earlier audiences to Bent's writings. The new coffee-table format, Zimmerman's lovely plates, and the cloth binding make *Woodpeckers* well worth the current price of \$29.95. Unfortunately, the black-and-white photographs that appeared in earlier versions were not included. Although few of the photographs are comparable to today's exceptional standards, they are of historic interest and are missed in this "deluxe" volume. Photographs of birds, nest sites, and habitats added to Bent's original text. I do not think that any artist's rendition could suffice to match the black-and-white photographs, taken in Louisiana, of some of the last Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. Perhaps the original photographs can be resurrected in subsequent volumes.—DONNA L. DITTMANN, *Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803, USA.*