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A Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia: Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia.—Craig Robson, with illustrations by Richard Allen, Tim Worfolk, Stephen Message, Jan Wilczur, Clive Byers, Mike Langman, Ian Lewington, Christopher Schmidt, Andrew Mackay, John Cox, Anthony Disley, Hilary Burn, Daniel Cole, and Martin Elliott. 2000. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. 504 pp., 104 color plates, 2 maps, 1 drawing. ISBN 0-691-05012-0. Cloth, \$59.50.—Twenty-five years after the publication of Ben King's *A Field Guide to Birds of Southeast Asia* (1975), a new and improved field guide to the region has hit the shelves. The last decade has seen a proliferation of field guides in this region. Most of those guides deal with individual countries such as Thailand, or smaller, yet ornithologically distinct subregions of Southeast Asia such as Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore. However, for those travelling far and wide in Southeast Asia in search of birds, the unrevised King guide was the only one available until now.

Robson set a lofty goal for himself with this book: to treat all species found in the region as completely as possible while staying within the size limits of a field guide. Considering that this book covered 1,252 species and is, in fact, field-guide-size is amazing. Furthermore, it is even more unbelievable when one considers how thoroughly species are covered. All but 11 species are illustrated and, where necessary, distinct plumage variations (sex, age, and subspecies) are shown. Written descriptions cover plumage, vocalization, breeding, nests and egg information, habitat and behavior, as well as range and status of each species, both within and outside Southeast Asia. As a result, this complete yet compact book is crowded. It is not unusual to see 14 species and up to 36 full and partial illustrations on a single 23 × 15 cm plate. The text is also small (approximately 8 point font).

The crowding, however, is mitigated by a well-organized layout and design. Introductory notes include a map defining distinct ornithological subregions within Southeast Asia, and an explanation of the taxonomy and nomenclature used in the book. Guidelines on how to use species account information, a glossary, avian topography diagram, and descriptions of the various habitats found in Southeast Asia are also provided.

The illustrations are greatly improved over King's guide. Robson's guide illustrates approximately 400 more species than does King's, and, unlike King's, all illustrations are in color. With 14 illustrators contributing to the book, one might expect some obvious discontinuity among plates, but that is not the case. A few criticisms: the spiderhunter (family Nectari-

niidae, genus *Arachnothera*) bills look a little shorter and fatter than they do in the field, and a few plates (for example, crows and jays [family Corvidae, various genera], and malkohas and cuckoos [family Cuculidae]) appeared slightly washed out in color. Distribution maps would have increased the size of the book significantly, but having some type of code in the plate section indicating ornithological subregions in which a species is found, such as that found in Mackinnon and Phillips (1993), would have helped speed identification.

The species accounts are informative. In addition to the plumage, vocalizations, range (in and out of Southeast Asia) and habitat information also found in King's guide, Robson includes information on status, breeding, nests, and eggs. The plumage descriptions are very detailed and clear, and vocalization descriptions are accurate for the species I know. Sub-specific differences are also described in adequate detail in this guide.

In the field, birdwatchers may be bothered by the taxonomic order that Robson chose. The taxonomy, sequence, and nomenclature follow *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (Inskipp 1996), which is based on Sibley and Monroe (1990, 1993). The author recognizes the controversial nature of this treatment, but felt it was the best sequence proposed at the time. Although many arguments can be made both for and against the Sibley and Monroe taxonomy, my concern is more practical than theoretical. If this book had been designed as a general reference book, then choice of taxonomic treatment would be a matter of educated opinion as to whether the Sibley and Monroe sequence is more reflective of true evolutionary relationship than other taxonomic sequences. However, the author went to great lengths to make this book conform to the requirements of a field guide, and the main purpose of a good field guide is to allow the reader to quickly and correctly identify birds in the field. Most experienced birders know approximately where to turn in a field guide to find plates and species accounts, but the organization of such information in most guides is vastly different from the Sibley and Monroe taxonomy. Despite the initial inconvenience, I was able to learn the new sequence within about a week of heavy use. If one is concerned that the reader might want to know more about true evolutionary relationships, a brief summary of the Sibley and Monroe scheme (or more recent findings) for each family could be placed in another section of the book, as in the Simpson and Day guides to Australian birds published by Penguin Books. Another compromise might be to place the plates in a familiar sequence while leaving the text in phylogenetic sequence.

Any nitpicking aside, this is the best field guide to the entire Southeast Asian region, and arguably one of the most informative field guides around. The de-

tailed information reflects the author's years of travel through the region as well as his careful planning and organization. It is sure to be the definitive field-guide to the region for years to come.—ALISON R. STYRING, *Department of Biological Sciences and Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803, USA. astyring@aol.com*

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