Several books reviewed in the *Bulletin*, and many others, including the major African field guides and avifaunas, can be purchased via the African Bird Club website from WildSounds. The Club receives a donation for its Conservation Fund for every item purchased via the Books and Media Sales page. Click the 'Buy Now' button by the relevant book to check the latest price, purchase the item and help us to protect Africa's birds.


The Birder's Guide to Africa


Before I venture to any part of Africa I carry out a literature search, seeking out lists of key species for the area I have chosen, and prioritising my chances of seeing endemic and near-endemic species. As a travelling birder, I want to assemble in one place all of the essential information that I need. I am sure this is true of many birders the world over, although to different degrees of intensity. This new book provides all of this information for Africa in a single volume, and laid out in an easily understood format. Nowhere else can you find all these data in one place.

After some useful introductory information about African birding and suggestions on how best to use the book, the first main chapter covers 108 pages with details of the 68 territories that comprise Africa, including 50 mainland states and 18 island territories. Each territory is given a rank that indicates its importance for seeing birds, with Madagascar taking the top position followed by South Africa. A list of endemics is shown together with near-endemics, but also three other categories. BT indicates 'Best Territory' for a species that you can see in other territories, but should see more easily there, 1/2 indicates a species that can be seen in only two territories, and B2 is for species found best in two territories but can be found elsewhere.

The taxonomy and nomenclature used is that of the IOC World Bird List version 7.1 (Gill & Donsker 2017), but potential future splits are not ignored, and the suggested names for these are shown in red. A small number of recently extinct species are displayed in red. A list of the main habitats of each territory are shown, as are favoured birding sites and Endemic Birding Areas. The timing of a visit is important, and an indication of the best time to visit is given. There are also suggestions on whether there are opportunities to explore relatively new areas. A very useful subsection gives an insight into the relative safety of each territory, with information on visas, health, climate and other attractions. I particularly appreciated the summary of literature sources, websites and available sound-recordings.

The next chapter covers 150 pages and is a series of 338 photographic images, primarily by Tasso Leventis, representing each of the 142 bird families recorded from Africa. These are of high quality and many cover a full page or half-page. Each family is also described briefly.

The final chapter consists of 244 pages and is a detailed listing of all of the 2,792 bird species found in Africa, with short summaries of c. 50 words on each, indicating range and highlighting races. Taxonomic issues for each family are also discussed. Once again, any potential splits are shown in green text. For each species there is at least one suggestion of a site where it can be looked for.

Michael Mills has thought carefully about the needs of his potential readership, and not everyone is a world lister. Apart from calculating the statistics as to which which territory has the most endemics, he has rated each of them for the needs of each type of visitor.
If you are a budget traveller he has ranked them to reflect whether you could really afford to visit. So, for budget birders Madagascar drops down to tenth place while South Africa and Uganda are first and second. Then there are what he describes as ‘balanced birders’ (correctly indicating that world listers are rather unbalanced!). These are people who want safety and variety, and again South Africa is in first place, but Tanzania moves into second place. Finally, he ranks the territories for people who want to explore and seek out little-known species. The Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola take first and second places, followed by Liberia and Tanzania.

A list of around 250 reference books and papers is provided, with preference given to smaller, more specific works rather than continent-wide major tomes. In addition, there is a list of c.100 useful websites where more information about sites and territories can be found.

The arrival of this book coincided with a trip to Tanzania for me, so I was able to put the country section to test. I was really impressed by the amount of information presented, and had it arrived two weeks earlier it would have saved me two days with my head stuck in a pile of reference books! It showed me that Tanzania has 366 species that are of particular interest, with 39 endemics and five near-endemics. Tanzania is rated third overall of the 68 territories assessed. There are 12 species that you can see in other countries but should find more easily here, 40 others that can be seen in only two countries and 32 species that are best found in Tanzania and another territory, but can also be found elsewhere.

This is an essential reference for anyone who takes birding trips to Africa and needs useful information presented clearly. The amount of work that has gone into it is clearly immense and it will undoubtedly save travelling birders a lot of time searching for information.

Keith Betton

Reference
www.worldbirdnames.org