THE BIRDER’S GUIDE TO AFRICA
BY MICHAEL MILLS

Clare Disano reviews a comprehensive guide to bird watching in the African region, covering all mainland territories and associated islands, written by South African bird guide and bird conservationist, Michael Mills.
The Birder’s Guide to Africa by Michael Mills

The Birder’s Guide to Africa is a very comprehensive guide of birds across the entire continent (including island territories), making it the perfect companion for anyone that travels to see, or photograph birds.

The basis of the book is to encourage travelling to new or little-known areas, giving advice to help the reader make informed decisions on where to go birding, how best to do it and to generally promote birdwatching across Africa for travellers and intrepid explorers.

I'm sure it will have you dreaming of the bountiful bird species to be discovered in the country's savannahs and jungles.

Author, Michael Mills, is an ornithologist, birder, bird guide and bird book author, previously writing The Special Birds of Angola. Originally from South Africa, he is also a conservation biologist who has been involved in several research projects in Angola.

Michael is regarded as an authority on African bird identification and ecology, having published more than seventy peer-reviewed papers on the birds of the continent. He has travelled extensively around Africa over the past twenty-five years, so has first-hand experience of over two thousand bird species in the African region. He has also visited more than twenty-five countries and has spent over a year in the field in Angola conducting bird surveys, making him the foremost expert on Angolan birds.

A nature conservationist by heart, Michael cares deeply about Africa’s biodiversity and ecosystems. Since completing his Master’s Degree in Conservation Biology at the University of Cape Town, he has been leading conservation projects in Angola, focussed on the key habitats for threatened, endemic birds that are not protected by the formal conservation area network, namely escarpment forest and Afromontane forest. To these ends, he has established projects at Mount Moco and Kumbira Forest, executed in collaboration with local partners.
with an aim of building local capacity, and encompassing community consultation and collaboration, reforestation, bird surveys and monitoring and finding alternatives to human behaviours threatening these forests. This work is in-line with Angolan priorities set by the global BirdLife network and is conducted in collaboration with the Kissama Foundation, the leading Angolan conservation NGO. Michael strongly recognises the importance of utilising effective, evidence-based methods in his work.

While travel restrictions are still in place for most of us, this book will be a great asset to help plan your next birding trip to Africa while you wait for the travel bans to lift. I’m sure it will have you dreaming of the bountiful bird species to be discovered in the country’s savannas and jungles.

The vast majority of photos in the book are by Tasso Leventis, a businessman from London and self-proclaimed amateur photographer, who has also been involved in bird and wildlife conservation, particularly in Africa. Any images that are not taken by Tasso are credited in the introduction.

To start the book, the Introduction uses some tables and heat maps to help highlight themes and ratings, and gives the author’s overviews of the subject matter, as well as his theories, the best times to travel (including a birding calendar), and general advice on how to best use the book.

For wildlife, and particularly bird, photographers this detailed summary would be of great benefit to those who are looking to capture a certain variety or species of bird found on the continent.

Covering sixty-eight territories, one-hundred-and-forty-two bird families and almost two-thousand-eight-hundred bird species, the book is divided into three main areas of focus;

- Country accounts - information on each territory
- Family accounts - classification of bird families
- Species accounts - distribution, status, habitat, sub-species and the best places to see them.

Each category is given its own chapter and helps to break down the abundance of information into more manageable chunks.

The country accounts offer information about the region for birding, travel details for each territory including (but not limited to) safety, geography, money, climate and other attractions, as well as highlighting recommended reading and research for your chosen region.
The family accounts chapter is documented by photos, with information on the species in each family, giving the reader a more general overview of where they might be found and some of their characteristics. Documenting families helps to make a more achievable goal for those that would like to complete a list of birds seen or photographed, rather than trying to see every single species.

The species accounts present much more detailed information on subjects like distribution, status, habitat, sub-species, classification and the best places to see them. These entries are listed by the bird's family grouping, with information given to every species within that group, for example, the family 'Anatidae - Ducks, Geese, Swans and allies' lists seventy-five species, all of which are accounted for with relevant data and advice.

The index proves a very handy tool to find birds with their English group names, as well as separate indexes for the scientific family names and country accounts.

Twitchers and bird enthusiasts will be delighted by the exhaustive amount of information, which would also be of great interest to any budding ornithologists out there. Even those with a general interest will not be disappointed with this extensive guide, which is based on the author’s wealth of experience in the region. For wildlife, and particularly bird, photographers this detailed summary would be of great benefit to those who are looking to capture a certain variety or species of bird found on the continent.

In summary, this book will make a fabulous reference point for anyone who loves birds, wants to explore Africa to see or photograph birds, or just wants an excuse to dream about doing so. For birders, the book alone will provide a wealth of information, even if you don’t get to visit all, or any, of Africa’s territories as, obviously, not all species are endemic. For those that are looking for their next photographic adventure, maybe this is just thing to whet your appetite!

The Birder’s Guide to Africa by Michael Mills is available to purchase from - www.nhbs.com/the-birders-guide-to-africa-book £34.95

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