

## REVIEW

**Sonobe, K. & Usui, S. (Eds.) 1993. *A Field Guide to the Waterbirds of Asia*. Wild Bird Society of Japan, Tokyo. 224pp.**

[Tart by Bharat Bhushan, Graham Fry, Akira Hibi, Taej Mundkur, Dewi M. Prawiradilaga, Koichiro Sonobe, and Shunji Usui. Illustrations by Takashi Taniguchi. Produced in collaboration with Asian Wetland Bureau and the Tokai Foundation.]

One main objective of this pocket guide (and at 18.0 x 11.5 cm, it will fit into some pockets) appears to be to assist the many volunteers who participate each year in the Asian Waterfowl Census. The concept is excellent - a simple guide, designed for use in the field, to every "waterbird" likely to be encountered in a region that covers about a fifth of the globe.

The region extends from eastern Russia and Pakistan to Japan and Indonesia, but excludes Irian Jaya. The groups covered are the divers, grebes, pelicans, cormorants, flamingoes, herons and bitterns, storks and ibises, duck, geese and swans, cranes, rails, finfoot and jacanas, stone curlews, shorebirds, gulls and terns. A total of 327 species is described, but "genuine marine species, in particular ducks and gulls, are excluded". Clearly the pelagic families are omitted, but it would have been useful to know which ducks and gulls were excluded. Should they have been?

Some 27 introductory pages provide a simple and concise introduction, including bird topography, waterbirds in Asia, migration, and wetland habitats. There then follows the systematic section. At the back, a checklist provides distributional data and status in 24 countries. A bibliography covers four pages. Overall, the utilization of space is optimal and well planned.

The systematic section forms the bulk of the book. The plates are of a consistent high standard, and are a pleasure to use. Wherever appropriate, birds are shown in flight, breeding, non-breeding and juvenile plumages are illustrated, and significant subspecific variations are depicted. It is a joy to have, for the first time in accessible form, plates that give all the Wallacean endemic rails, and the various restricted range woodcocks in Asia including the three endemics in Indonesia.

This unreserved praise does not extend to the text, which tends to be brief and sometimes unhelpful. Each species has a different author (initials are given), but differences in style between countries is not a problem. However, although 'similar species' are identified in very many cases, comparisons are in general weak. The bird-watcher in Java, struggling with the Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* and the Little Cormorant *P. niger*, will not be assisted by the text of the former stating merely that the latter species is smaller. The text for the latter, by a different author, compares only with *P. pygmaeus*, not with *sulcirostris*.

Notes on distribution are particularly weak, e.g. Storm's Stork: "resident in central part of South-East Asia", or Black Ibis: "resident in South Asia and north part of South-East Asia". This leads to a much stronger complaint, the taxonomic inconsistencies. In the latter case, *Pseudibis davisoni* of Kalimantan and Indo-China is treated as a subspecies of *P. papillosa*. For the Grey Teal *Anas gracilis*, only the nominate and the Andamans *albogularis* subspecies are illustrated, and the opportunity has been lost to compare Australian *gracilis* and Indonesian *gibberifrons*, whatever taxonomic status is finally accepted for these. Another missed opportunity is the failure to acknowledge the existence of the Javan Plover *Charadrius javanicus*.

The nomenclature is confusing. Every *Charadrius* is named "plover" or "sand plover" except the Red-capped *C. ruficapillus* which becomes a dotterel. Out of five species of *Amauornis*, two are "water hens", one is a "moorhen" and two are "crakes". This may not be the fault of this specific book, but it does indicate the need for clear and simple rules for english nomenclature. However, the rules must allow for generic transpositions - Elwes' Crake *Amauornis bicolor* is elsewhere known as Black-tailed Crake *Porzana bicolor*.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, the overall quality of formatting, style and reproduction are high, and indeed for the plates alone, I would have no hesitation in recommending this book to students of waterbirds in our region. Indonesians will regret, however, that their Irianese crakes must be relegated to non-Asian status!

DAH

**Also received:**

**MacKinnon, J. & K. Phillips. 1993. *A field guide to the birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Kali*. Oxford University Press. 491 + xvi pp.**

The review of this book has been postponed until the next issue, because of a fire in which the first draft was destroyed.