
Reviews

Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 11: Old World Flycatchers to Old World Warblers. del Hoyo, J., A. Elliott & D. Christie (eds). Lynx Edicions. Price 199,00€ (£138). ISBN 84-96553-06-X [800 pages, 55 colour plates, 343 colour photographs, and 733 distribution maps]

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Volume 11 of this remarkable series continues with the passerines, and includes the following families: Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers), Platysteiridae (Batises and Wattle-eyes), Rhipiduridae (Fantails), Monarchidae (Monarch-flycatchers), Regulidae (Kinglets and Firecrests), Polioptilidae (Gnatcatchers), Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and allies) and the Sylviidae (Old World Warblers). In an Indonesian context, it therefore includes several important families, most notably the Old World Flycatchers, Monarch-flycatchers and Fantails, all of which are well represented in the archipelago.

As with other volumes, the Foreword is an informative, succinct chapter; in this case, the subject is the “ecological significance of bird populations” by Cagan Sekercioglu. The chapter provides an overview of the contribution to ecosystem functions that is made by fruit-eating and flower-visiting birds, and briefly investigates the subject of pest control by insectivorous birds, and the roles played by raptors and scavengers. It also covers the rarely mentioned but important role that birds play in nutrient cycling, in particular, that played by seabirds.

The book follows the usual HBW format, with an overview of each family, followed by accounts of each species, accompanied by range maps. Each species is illustrated alongside related taxa, and in cases of significant variation within species, several races are often illustrated together (although there is little information in the text on how the races differ). It is difficult to judge the accuracy of so many paintings, but overall the quality looks very good. The photographs are, as usual, of a very high standard, and include the only published photo of the recently rediscovered Large-billed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orinus*. This species, described in 1905 from one specimen from northern India, was trapped in southern Thailand in March 2006 and could potentially occur in Sumatra. However, identifying it in the field would pose a serious problem.

The range maps, on first glance, look impressively detailed for the most part, although as with other volumes, there are many instances when an entire island, such as Borneo, is shown as part of the range, even though this is clearly not the reality. The range map for Mangrove Blue-flycatcher *Cyornis rufigastra* show its range as entirely coastal. In some parts of its range this polytypic species is indeed coastal, but on Sulawesi the race *omissus* (possibly a good species, and

illustrated in this volume) is a montane bird which occurs up to 2,300m above sea level in Lore Lindu (Coates & Bishop 1985). However, for many Indonesian taxa it is hard to find range maps anywhere, especially since most of the standard "Indonesian" field guides (i.e., Beehler *et al.* 1986; MacKinnon & Phillipps 1993; Coates & Bishop 1997) contain such maps, so those of HBW are very useful to have, especially since they give a global perspective to the distribution of each species. For New Guinea, including West Papua (Irian Jaya), however, the maps in Coates (1985, 1990) are probably more accurate than many of those in HBW.

One of my only dislikes of the HBW set is that it lacks detailed citations within the species account texts (they all appear together at the end of the account), making it impossible to link a particular fact with a particular reference. I feel that this is a serious flaw. On the other hand, HBW has now announced that the index will be available on-line through the Internet Global Index at www.hbw.com, making it a lot easier to find what you are looking for and negating the need to trawl through several volumes (note that you need to register to use the index). It is also worth mentioning that you can now view video footage of a third of the world's bird species at www.hbw.com/ibc. Making all the references available on-line would also be worth considering.

Nobody can expect to be entirely happy with all the taxonomic decisions made in this book, and it would be inappropriate here to do more than draw attention to some of the more interesting decisions. As with other volumes, there sometimes seems to be inconsistency in the taxonomic approach taken. For example, it seems very odd that the distinctive *elisae* race of Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina* is not treated as a separate species, when other very similar flycatchers have been split (see Plate 4). The nominate race of this species is a non-breeding visitor to Kalimantan, whilst *elisae* visits Malaysia and Peninsular Thailand. On the other hand, the Sumba Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa segregata* is recognised by HBW as being a distinct species from Asian Brown Flycatcher *M. dauurica*. All this demonstrates, however, is that we are still a long way away from deciding on species limits for many of the less-studied species. HBW has to rely on published material to make its decisions, and for many species, this is just not available.

Another family that is certainly in need of further taxonomic attention is the Monarchidae. Many of these taxa are scattered among the Pacific and Indonesian islands, and remain little known. With six species of monarch extinct since 1600, and others precariously rare, it would seem a priority to establish which of the 289 recognised taxa should be treated as species. At present, only 97 of these taxa are recognised as species, but there are likely to be others. For example, HBW illustrates four of the nine races of Spectacled Monarch *Monarcha trivirgatus*, of which *diadematus* (of Obi and Bisa) and the other north Moluccan race, *bimaculatus*, have been proposed as a separate species; *diadematus* resembles Black-bibbed Monarch *M. mundus* of Damar, Babar and the Tanimbars. Also of taxonomic interest is that the two species of *Philentoma*

(Maroon-breasted Flycatcher *P. velata* and Rufous-winged Philentoma *P. pyrhoptera*), are treated as monarchs in HBW, though their phylogeny is poorly understood and there have even been suggestions that they may be more closely related to the vangas of Madagascar (see Dickinson 2003).

The biggest family included in Volume 11 is the Sylviidae, with an incredible 270 species comprising 660 taxa that are distributed amongst 42 genera. Recent years have seen many revisions of species limits within this family, particularly amongst the leaf-warblers. Most of these revisions involve Palearctic and Asian taxa that are relatively well-known, but two of the latter, namely Mountain Leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus trivirgatus* (11 races among the Lesser Sundas, Greater Sundas, Philippines and Peninsular Malaysia) and Island Leaf-warbler *P. poliocephalus* (19 races from eastern Wallacea to the Solomons, plus a possible undescribed race on Taliabu), have not been taxonomically scrutinised, and very likely include a number of unrecognised species. Amongst the *Bradypterus* warblers, the races of the Chestnut-backed Bush-warbler *B. castaneus* on Buru (*disturbans*) and Sulawesi (nominate) sing differently (pers. obs.), and thus may represent different species. Studies of the two races of Sunda Warbler *Seicercus grammiceps* (one on Sumatra, the other on Java) might also show that more than one species is involved.

All of these species-limit changes illustrate what we are all growing to accept, that taxonomy is rapidly changing, and indeed, is almost impossible to keep up with. Indeed, the many taxonomic changes that have already appeared in the HBW series means that Coates & Bishop (1997) is now well out of date, and users of this book would be well-advised to check which of the races in it are now recognised as species in their own right. The same goes for the Checklist of Indonesian Birds No. 2 (Sukmantoro *et al.* 2007), which is already in need of an update, although this might best be left until the completion of the HBW series. Of course, the sad truth is that by the end of the HBW series, taxonomic changes will render the earlier volumes less useful to readers. This could be overcome by making available an electronic form of the book that could be updated as new taxonomic evidence comes to light - something that the editors might consider.

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Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 12: Picathartes to Tits and Chickadees. del Hoyo, J., A. Elliott & D.A. Christie (eds). Lynx Edicions. Price €205.00. ISBN 84-96553-42-2. Oct 2007.

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If you are lucky enough to already own the eleven volumes that precede this 816-page tome, you may be wondering where you will fit the other five volumes that will complete the set. Imagine, however, if you had to accommodate a staggering 2,640 volumes on your bookshelves! This is approximately the number that would be needed if HBW was to have covered all the birds that had ever existed on the planet (in similar detail), estimated to have been 1,634,000 since the first recognised genus, *Archaeopteryx*, appeared some 150 million years ago. This is something I gleaned from the informative and incredibly fascinating Foreword to HBW12, an essay on Fossil Birds by K.J. Caley. The chapter traces the evolution of birds from dinosaurs, and provides an insight into the ongoing controversy over what really was the first “real” bird. The essay provides an overview of what we know about the various families of birds from the fossil record. Clearly, there is a huge amount we don’t know, but what we do makes great reading, and the Foreword is packed with intriguing facts.

For example, the planet’s avifauna was once dominated by what are known as the “opposite birds”, a sister group to a lineage of modern birds that diversified to occupy all the niches that modern birds occupy today. Hence the Enantiornithes and other toothed birds dominated the planet throughout the later Cretaceous period (97-65 million years ago), but then died out, whilst the ancestors of modern birds radiated and become dominant between 65 and 56 million years ago. Whilst the fossil record is very incomplete, especially for the passerines (which all have similar skeletons) and small non-passerines, the study of those fossils we have provides a fantastic insight into the birds that once inhabited our planet. Imagine, for example, encountering *Aepyornis maximus* in

the forests of Madagascar, a bird some 3 metres high, and weighing up to 450 kilograms (the Ostrich weighs a mere 100-130 kilograms). Or imagine sea watching off the coast of California some 23 million years ago and glimpsing a passing *Osteodontornis*, a pelagic pelican-like bird with a wingspan of up to 6 metres! Even bigger, however, were the vulture-like “teratorns” that inhabited Argentina 5-10 million years ago, with wingspans of up to 6.8 metres, the largest known flying birds to have ever lived.

The Foreword of Volume 12 is full of facts about such creatures, and well worth reading. And whilst one comes away with the feeling that so many incredible birds are already extinct, our planet still harbours a bewildering array of extant birds, as the remainder of this book will show. A significant number of today’s birds, nevertheless, face the prospect of extinction driven by human activities, rather than evolutionary change, and we should not let this slip from our minds. Indonesia, of course, is one of the mega-diversity countries where many of today’s threatened and least-known birds persist. This volume reminds us, for example, that the Black-browed Babbler *Malacocincla perspicillata* is still only known from one specimen dating from the 1840s, and also suggests where we should be looking for it: in the Pleihari Martapura Nature Reserve of southern Kalimantan.

Volume 12 covers a diverse group of bird families, but the great majority are to be found in Asia, Australasia and the Pacific, or in Africa. Only 12 New World species are included. A large proportion of the book (222 pages) is devoted to the babblers (Timaliidae), with 309 species or 872 taxa in 84 genera, of which just over fifty species occur in Indonesia. It should be emphasised, however, that there are still a number of species included within the treatment adopted by HBW which may not actually be babblers: the Timaliidae has, it seems, long been considered as a “taxonomic dustbin”, into which species of uncertain affinities have been thrown. Hence some of the species included in this volume are almost certainly not babblers, and are likely to be moved elsewhere as molecular taxonomic studies proceed. The *Pteruthius* shrike-babblers and White-bellied Erpornis (White-bellied Yuhina in most texts) are two such Indonesian examples. Such studies have already demonstrated that the Rail Babbler *Eupetes macrocerus*, a bird familiar to many Indonesian birders, is *not*, after all, a babbler, and it is now placed in the Eupetidae (jewel-babblers), as is the strange Blue-capped Ifrita (*Ifrita kowaldi*) and the two *Melampitta* species of the highlands of New Guinea, including Papua. Note that in the Checklist of Indonesian Birds No. 2 (Sukmantoro *et al.* 2007) this family is called Orthonychidae, a family that is now restricted to the three species of logrunners, one of which occurs in Papua.

Of the other families, those with representatives in Indonesia are Pachycephalidae (whistlers; 33 of 56), Petroicidae (Australasian robins; 25 of 46), Maluridae (fairywrens; five of 27), Acanthizidae (thornbills; 23 of 63), Climacteridae (Australasian treecreepers; one of seven), Neosittidae (sittellas; both species) and Paridae (tits; one of 56 species). The great majority of the

Indonesian representatives of these families are to be found in Papua, and to a lesser extent on the islands in the east of the archipelago. The last of these families (Paridae) has representatives all across the Holarctic, unlike the other families treated, but includes one species that occurs in Indonesia, the highly variable Great Tit *Parus major*. The Indonesian taxa (three races) form part of the grey-backed, whitish-bellied group, which may in fact be a species distinct from the other groups.

Looking at various field guides on my bookshelves, I find that the taxonomy and species limits of the babblers, in particular, have changed very dramatically. This is largely thanks to the careful work of Nigel Collar and Craig Robson, the authors of this important chapter of Volume 12. Collar (2006) provides much of the science that has led to the many changes in babbler taxonomy, but to see all the changes, there is no alternative single reference than HBW. Hence, for birders keen on Asian or Indonesian birds, this really is a volume of HBW not to miss. For example, there are now four species of *Macronus* in Indonesia, since the former Striped Tit-babbler *M. gularis* has been split into two species: the Bold-striped Tit-babbler *M. bornensis* of Borneo and Java, and the Pin-striped Tit-babbler *M. gularis* of mainland Southeast Asia, Palawan and Sumatra. Also note that most of the wren-babblers have been transferred from the genus *Napothera* (e.g. Sukmantoro *et al.* 2007) to *Turdinus*.

Amongst the laughingthrushes, which were previously mostly in the genus *Garrulax*, there are many taxonomic changes, in particular in the number of genera, which has increased to eleven, most of which are unfamiliar. I was glad to see that the Black-and-white Laughingthrush *Garrulax bicolor*, a distinctive Sumatran endemic, has been split from the much more widespread White-crested Laughingthrush *G. leucolophus*. This is a species that has become very localised due to the ceaseless search for such songbirds by professional bird trappers, who have penetrated some of the most remote forests in the Sumatran highlands and could annihilate populations of easily caught species such as this with little difficulty. The present threat level assigned to this beautiful species, of Vulnerable, seems to me to be optimistic. Another recent laughingthrush split is the Bornean endemic Chestnut-hooded Laughingthrush *Rhinocichla treacheri*, separated from the Spectacled (formerly Chestnut-capped) Laughingthrush *R. mitrata* of Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra. The two species resulting from this split have been given their own genus *Rhinocichla* because of some morphological differences from *Garrulax*. A very similar treatment was given to the former Black Laughingthrush *Garrulax lugubris*, now accommodated in the rehabilitated genus *Melanocichla* and split into two species: the Black *M. lugubris* of Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, and the Bare-headed Laughingthrush *M. calva* of northern Borneo.

It is pleasing to see that the distribution maps are more detailed than has been the case for many of the families in previous volumes of the series. However, being more precise presents the risk of omitting details, and especially in the case of the babblers it appears that maps for Indonesia are incomplete. This

is embarrassing because many of the lacking data are still hidden in consultancy reports, or in apparently unconsulted volumes of the Sarawak Museum Journal or Kukila. For instance, the widespread Bold-striped Babbler *Macronus bornensis* is allegedly absent from most of West Kalimantan and entire East Kalimantan, whereas in reality, it is one of the most common birds in disturbed areas of these provinces (van Balen 1996; Gönner 2000).

Therefore, from a taxonomic perspective, HBW Volume 12 is an extremely useful reference book for those interested in Indonesian birds, but as with previous volumes, it is very much more than this. The species accounts and family accounts contain a wealth of up to date information, the photos are wonderful and the plates depict many taxa that you will not find illustrated elsewhere. This is an excellent book to own!

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