

REVIEWS

Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 6: Mousebirds to Hornbills

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Volume six starts with an informative and lengthy chapter on Avian Bioacoustics that covers not only vocalisations, but also other sounds made by birds, such as the drumming of snipe. This essay is comprehensive, discussing for example, how such sounds are produced, individual variation and dialects, function and evolution, and the increasingly important contribution that knowledge of bioacoustics brings to our understanding of avian taxonomy.

The sixth volume in this series was ambitiously planned to cover the bird groups from mousebirds to woodpeckers, but due to the abundance of material and information on many of the taxa concerned, the volume was divided into two. This appears to have been a good decision, since the present volume does not in any way suggest a reduction in standard or indeed of size compared to the first five volumes. This volume covers the mousebirds, trogons, and the Coraciformes, a large grouping that includes some widespread species important in Asian ornithology; the kingfishers, bee-eaters, rollers and hornbills. One consequence of the decision to reduce the number of species covered in this volume is the inclusion of more photographs on these particular groups than would have been possible with the original plan. As usual, the range and quality of photographs is breathtaking, with the great majority clearly taken in natural situations (*Actenoides* kingfishers and two of the trogons appear to be exceptions).

The text is fairly up to date; for example reproducing the range map for Plain-pouched Hornbill used by Rasmussen (2000) and hence correcting the "certain" range depicted by Kemp (1995) that included most of Thailand and central Burma. Whether this species occurs in Sumatra, which is still a possibility given the difficulty of identification in the field, remains to be clarified. Whilst the text takes account of the recent work on Plain-pouched and Wreathed Hornbills, the hornbill plates unfortunately fail to depict the yellow-pouched variant of the female Wreathed Hornbill. One is, nevertheless, clearly visible (using a magnifying glass) in the photograph of a roost of Wreathed Hornbills on page 450 of HBW.

Despite an attempt to keep the text as up-to-date as possible, there are inevitable errors and some recent literature was presumably too new to include. One oversight, for example, is that there is no mention of the fact that there are historical records of very large flocks of Rhinoceros Hornbills – sadly, these kind of sightings appear to be a thing of the past, especially with the ominous but credible prediction by Derek Holmes that most lowland and hill forests in the Indonesian part of Sundaic region will be lost by the year 2010 (World Bank 2000). In a recent paper by Anggraini *et al.* (2000) the long-held belief that Helmeted and Rhinoceros Hornbill are strictly territorial is challenged, with the suggestion that these birds exhibit facultative territoriality; though one wonders whether recent changes in forest cover and forest fire have displaced many hornbills, hence affecting observed behaviour. It is also worth noting that the work on Sumba Hornbill by Juhaeni on which the account for this species in HBW is based, is apparently highly suspect (M. Kinnaird *pers. comm.*).

Another consequence of dividing the volume was presumably that more taxa of the groups covered could be illustrated than might have been originally possible. These illustrations, often of taxa not illustrated in other available literature, is one of the most interesting aspects of the series. Quick perusal of plates showing the remarkable variation that is apparent in some species provide encouragement and stimulus to those interested in taxonomic challenge, and at the same time highlights one weaker aspect of parts of this volume.

For example, one cannot help wondering if the 19 illustrated subspecies (of 49 treated) of Collared Kingfisher and 10 (of 14) illustrated subspecies of Variable Kingfisher can really belong under the umbrella of a single species. Indeed, the taxonomic treatment of kingfishers is conservative and perhaps represents a lost opportunity to re-evaluate earlier taxonomic treatments (e.g. Fry *et al.* 1992); though one advance with the bee-eaters is that *Merops philippinensis* is recognized in HBW, whilst it was lumped with *M. superciliosus* in Fry *et al.* (1992). In contrast, the taxonomy of the trogons presented demonstrates an effort to review previous treatments, with the splitting of Blue-tailed Trogon into Javan and Sumatran endemic species, both of which are included in the resurrected genus *Apalharpactes* rather than *Harpactes*. I was also encouraged to see the magnificent and unique Helmeted Hornbill reinstated in the monotypic genus *Rhinoplax*, rather than included in *Buceros*, as it has been in some recent treatments, following Kemp & Woodcock (1995).

When the taxonomy of HBW is compared with that of OBC there are a considerable number of differences. For the hornbills, for example, HBW recognizes both Austen's Brown Hornbill and Tickell's Brown Hornbill, which are lumped by Inskipp *et al.* (1996). Talaud Kingfisher, a taxon that is lumped with Collared Kingfisher in the OBC Checklist, is recognized as a distinct species, *Todiramphus enigma*, by HBW, although the basis for this particular split in published literature is still rather weak. The statement that "the two [*enigma* and *chloris*] occur together without interbreeding" in the section on taxonomy seems to me to be poorly documented with certainty. There are, inevitably, also differences in the use of English names that may irritate some readers. For example, hornbill nomenclature differs from that used by OBC, with different English names of some Philippine species of Tropic Hornbill *Penelopides* spp and with Indian Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*, which is called Malabar Pied Hornbill in the OBC list.

One disappointing aspect of this book, and indeed the majority of bird books, is that the maps showing distribution are very general, merely indicating the countries and approximate area in which a species occurs. Whilst rather time consuming, it would be far more interesting to present maps that, where feasible, showed the present range of a species based on its known habitat availability. This would bring to the attention of readers the seriously fragmented nature of the distribution of so many birds, especially in parts of the Asian region where forest bird populations are increasingly isolated from each other, with no possibility of genetic exchange. For example, in HBW the range of Rufous-headed Hornbill *Aceros waldeni* is shown as the entire islands of Negros, Panay and Guimaras, which is a gross misrepresentation of the facts.

In contrast to the first volumes in the series, the species texts provide some information on voice of all species; whilst this will be welcomed by many readers, and might prove to be useful, the range of voice for many species cannot possibly be expressed in such a short space. Perhaps a more useful contribution would be the provision of sonograms that illustrate the differences in voice between species or even subspecies where this has relevance to taxonomic decisions.

Whilst there are minor mistakes and oversights, such as some of those mentioned above, these are inevitable in a book of this nature. So I should stress that, overall, Volume 6 of HBW is an impressive piece of work and will prove to be a useful source of reference for anyone interested in Indonesian ornithology. Whilst I am sure that it will inevitably be available as a CDROM at some point in the future, the sheer magnificence of the photographs should convince most readers who can afford it that this is something worth adding to your bird book collection.

References

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