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Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide

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Source: The Auk, 123(3) : 916-918

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1642/0004-8038(2006)123[916:BOSATR]2.0.CO;2

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sizes and trend estimates for each country are expressed as a range between minimum and maximum values, accompanied by literature citations where available, though much information was obtained through communication with ornithologists and birdwatchers in each country. Data quality is assessed as poor, medium, or good, providing a basis to compare how data quality changed since the initial report. Conservation status assignments were somewhat subjective, especially distinctions between provisional and nonprovisional assignments, but such subjectivity is probably unavoidable.

The liberal use of acronyms may annoy non-European readers. For example, frequent reference to tables or appendices is necessary to understand the differences between SPEC1, SPEC2, and SPEC3, where SPEC stands for a Species of European Conservation Concern, and to decipher the perplexing set of identifiers used for European/Global IUCN Red List Criteria. Despite these annoying acronyms, the important information summarizing population size, trends, and conservation status can be understood by anyone having minimal fluency in English.

So how are European bird populations faring? During the past decade, the number of species considered to have unfavorable conservation status increased from 38% to 43% of the avifauna. Only 14 species improved from unfavorable to favorable status, as compared with 45 species whose status changed to unfavorable. Species associated with agricultural habitats continue to do poorly, mirroring trends apparent in North America. These results indicate that existing bird conservation activities are ineffective in achieving the goal of halting biodiversity loss across Europe by 2010.

This book provides an authoritative and coherent summary of the status of European birds. Everyone contributing to its publication should be congratulated for their efforts. It serves as an indispensable reference for anyone involved in European bird conservation and concisely summarizes the current status of the European avifauna for those with a global perspective. These data provide a benchmark against which future population changes can be measured, especially important now that the highly pathogenic form of the H5N1 virus has infected wild bird populations in Europe and could have a decidedly negative influence on population trends during the coming decade.—Bruce Peterjohn, *U.S. Geological Survey Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, 12100 Beech Forest Road, Laurel, Maryland 20708, USA. E-mail: bpeterjohn@usgs.gov*

The Auk 123(3):916–918, 2006
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Printed in USA.

Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide.—Pamela C. Rasmussen and John C. Anderton. 2005. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., and Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. 2 vols., 378 + 683 pp., 180 color plates, 2 color maps, and 1,430 small range maps. ISBN 84-87334-67-9. Cloth, $95.00.—Just seven years after the first of a couple of significant illustrated guides to the birds of the Indian subcontinent, along comes another. The interval is just long enough that most traveling western birdwatchers will want to consider buying this new one. It is an outstanding work; and in addition to Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, it includes Afghanistan and the Chagos Archipelago. It comes in two hardcover volumes: a *Field Guide* and a mass of detail entitled *Volume 2: Attributes and Status*.

The 378-page *Field Guide* weighs just under two pounds and requires a pocket 23 cm deep and, allowing for the guide's thickness, about 18 cm wide. The book is very well designed, except that, apparently for reasons of weight or size, the impressive contribution on voice has been included in the second volume. Ninety-five percent of the first volume is made up of 180 color plates, each with a facing page of maps and key field-identification points. The maps, mostly 2.5 × 2.5 cm, use five colors plus black and gray, as well as crosshatching and arrows. They are extremely well researched, based essentially on extensive databases of museum specimens and some records supported by photographs; by taking this route, Rasmussen leaves to critics the issue of which other sight records a field-guide author should assess and use when there is no national records committee. The remaining 18 pages include two title

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pages, a list of plates, one page explaining the use of the guide, and a six-page "plate index to genera and group names." The end papers provide four keys that lead the user quickly to the plates. These two features substitute, in the field, for an index. John Anderton, the art director, made the front and back cover images and some 70 of the 160 plates. Eleven other artists took part; their names appear beside their plates in the plate list. The standard is uniformly high to very high, which suggests that Anderton and Rasmussen worked hard to ensure this. Most of the images capture the feel of the species that I know in the field, and space is made for depictions of juveniles and birds in flight for a good choice of species. The plates, especially for difficult species like the small leaf-warblers, show considerable attention to detail, reflecting the field and museum experience of Rasmussen and her team. Two species are included that have not hitherto appeared in a field guide: Serendib Scops Owl (*Otus thilohoffamnni* Warakagoda and Rasmussen, 2001) and Nicobar Scops Owl (*Otus alius* Rasmussen, 1998).

The second volume is 50% thicker than the first and contains 683 pages. The full-color endpaper maps are well chosen: physical geography in front, with shaded altitudinal zones, and with state names and boundaries superimposed, and habitat zones in the back, with rivers and a latitude–longitude grid superimposed in blue, and state boundaries in black. The species accounts take up pages 41–601; the jacket says that "over 2500 known and likely taxa of birds" are covered: the "possibles" are distinguished by gray backgrounds to the accounts. This works out to less than a quarter of a page each, so expect the print size to be small. An amazing amount of detail is packed in, including detailed descriptions with underlining and bold type used for emphasis, reliable range statements, and notes on habits, including voice; sonograms are provided for almost 900 species. There are 12 "major content contributors" listed on the title page; most are well known for their field experience with Asian birds. One, Bruce Beehler, is better known in connection with New Guinea birds; he contributes the appreciation of Dillon Ripley. Ripley made this work possible, first through his own collaboration with Salim Ali and others to create the stepping stones to this work (Ripley's own *Synopsis*, or check-list, and the Ali and Ripley handbook, both works that went into revised editions), and later by attracting sponsors. Ripley's connections with the ornithology of this region were impeccable, and if he would have had just two regrets they would have been dying before this work could be finished and never having the time to do as much field work in the region as he would have liked.

The introduction to volume 2 is 25 pages and contains the necessary commentary on taxonomic treatment—necessary because this work makes numerous "splits," though some of those implemented have been proposed earlier. The case for saying that the application of the Biological Species Concept to the birds of this region has led to too much lumping of species is likely to receive wide agreement, and molecular studies will probably show that many smaller genera could be sensibly reintroduced. Rasmussen and her team put their field experience to good use in showing behavioral and habitat differences across range gaps between allopatric forms that were lumped, and one can be reasonably confident that their overall judgments of when to split and when not will prove sound. However, this reviewer is old-fashioned enough to believe that novel taxonomic arrangements, including reversions after lumping, should be presented in what was called "the primary literature" (I have sinned in this regard myself). This may seem unnecessary, and it has to do only marginally with peer review, but no field guide can give as much space to the detailed comparative information desirable when the treatments presented demonstrate reviews of satisfactory samples. Publishers in ornithology, in particular, finding a ready sale for their products, fail to sustain the "divide" and do science no service. Rasmussen is aware of this concern and promised this reviewer a determined effort to include enough information to be convincing; she is to be complimented for what she includes and for appendix 3, which draws together all that has changed. But on the whole, we are left with too little to judge by. Perhaps most in need of a follow-up are those species the author splits that range far beyond the limits of this book. These need to be explained in the context of their global ranges, specifying how the associated subspecies, from before the breakup, are to be redistributed. It would be helpful and appropriate to note those forms that are too weakly differentiated to warrant recognition. One imagines that the author

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has the database on which to found major parts of these reviews, and they would benefit the conservation of Asian birds and all those who enjoy watching them and want to know to what species the population they are watching is best attributed.

The two volumes are sold as a set and I strongly recommend them, but I hope that a softcover edition, based on the first volume but expanded to include many sonograms, will be offered for sale in the region covered, where the price of the two volumes combined will be a significant obstacle to widespread use.—Edward C. Dickinson, *Flat 3, Bolsover Court, 19 Bolsover Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN20 7JG, United Kingdom. E-mail: edward@asiaorn.org*

The Auk 123(3):918–920, 2006
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Return of the Peregrine: A North American Saga of Tenacity and Teamwork.—Edited by Tom J. Cade and William Burnham. 2003. The Peregrine Fund, Boise, Idaho. 394 pp., many illustrations and photographs. ISBN 0-9619839-3-0. Cloth, $59.50.—This book is a compendium of chapters and side-bars. Some are more technical than others, all are interesting and personal, and some also provide useful historical anecdotes. The authors were all directly involved in a huge effort (perhaps like none seen before) to understand the decline of a single bird species. The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) was in danger of extirpation throughout much of its worldwide range. There was also the possibility of extinction. None of this was alarmism. *Return of the Peregrine* is also the encouraging story of a carefully orchestrated recovery.

The account may be perceived as one-sided, and it is—as the editors state. If one were to read only Peakall (1993) and this book, one might get the mistaken impression that the entire story of discovery of contaminant effects, species endangerment, and remediation in wild birds happened solely with the Peregrine Falcon. Work on other species of raptors—Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), American Kestrel (*F. sparverius*), Merlin (*F. columbarius*), and many others—as well as innumerable other bird species—played equally into the larger scenario. Yet no bird species, not even our national symbol, received as much attention and awe as the Peregrine Falcon. As to where the peregrine mystique comes from, it is easily understood by anyone who has direct experience of Peregrine Falcons. In conservation, we need this "magic" as much as we need the hard data. And nearly every ornithologist I know has a special attraction to some particular avian group. I believe this bond helps make avian conservation successful. Those devoted to Peregrine Falcons have expressed this as well as could be.

Return of the Peregrine is not a comprehensive story of conservation biology and ecotoxicology in the 20th century. But an inspiring case-history in 20th-century conservation it certainly is. Experiences with the Peregrine Falcon have led to many current efforts in conservation. For example, recovery of the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) has moved in the same directions, modeled largely on the Peregrine Falcon effort (see Snyder and Snyder 2000). Another outcome, in my opinion, is the emerging explanation of a widespread crash in numbers of vultures (*Gyps* spp.) on the Indian subcontinent (related to diclofenac, a widely used veterinary medicine; Oaks et al. 2004, Risebrough 2004, Anonymous 2005).

The collective perspective from the many diverse contributors to *Return of the Peregrine* is unique, and it represents their monumental contributions to a truly successful effort—from start to finish: population decline, problems identified, suitable techniques rapidly developed and refined, a restoration effort begun before it is too late, troubled populations beginning to recover, and finally, wild populations becoming self-sustaining again—next problem! If only it were that simple; but these advances do not happen overnight. They involve efforts and commitments over lifetimes, huge personal commitments, and long-term devotions to a cause. This book describes such a web of involvements regarding the Peregrine Falcon.

In the early 1960s, there was great concern about the population status of many bird species. The events chronicled in *Return of the Peregrine* happened when modern management approaches, now routine, were just emerging.

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