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BOOK REVIEW

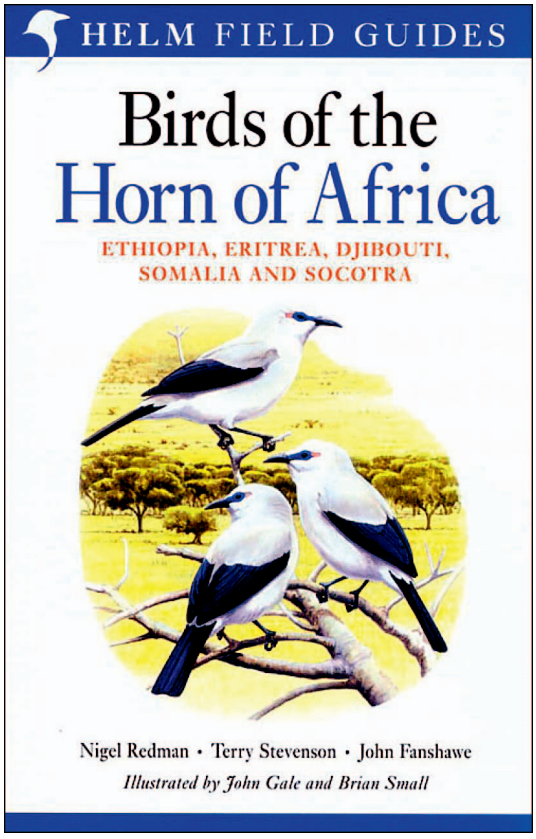
Birds of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Socotra

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Birds of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Socotra, revised and expanded edition, by Nigel Redman, Terry Stevenson, and John Fanshawe; illustrated by John Gale and Brian Small. 2016. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA. 512 pp., 213 color plates. $45 (paperback). ISBN 0691172897.



The Horn of Africa is a fascinating place with tremendous cultural, geographic, and biological diversity. It encompasses rich coastal mudflats, harsh deserts, moist tropical forests, and montane peaks in excess of 4,000 m, which are the source of the Blue Nile. It is bisected by the Great African Rift Valley, which is dotted with a series of freshwater and alkaline lakes. The region is almost completely covered by the Horn of Africa and Eastern Afromontane global biodiversity hotspots, reflecting its highly diverse, unique, and threatened biodiversity. Indeed, it has the highest levels of bird endemism in Africa, with 79 endemic or near-endemic species. Furthermore, the region is located along an important migratory flyway for both Eurasian and intra-African migrants, making it an excellent destination to observe birds that breed in parts of the Middle East, Central Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, which can be difficult to see elsewhere. In total, the Horn of Africa is host to more than 1,000 bird species, or nearly half of all bird species found in sub-Saharan Africa.

The fantastic first edition of *Birds of the Horn of Africa*, published in 2009, was the first and only comprehensive bird field guide to cover this region. It brought attention to and facilitated birdwatching in the Horn like never before, helping to make it an increasingly popular birding destination. In 2011, Helm Field Guides published a second edition of the book, improving on what was already one of the most beautiful and user-friendly bird guides available anywhere. The "revised and expanded edition" reviewed here was published in the Princeton Field Guides series in 2016 and is a reprint of the second edition. Thus, if you already have the second edition, don't expect any updates in this version. Nonetheless, this reprint has made the work more widely available.

This guide follows what is now the standard format, with species accounts and distribution maps next to illustrations of each species. The detailed color drawings, which often include multiple depictions of each species to show subspecies, sexes, and plumages, provide ample details to allow identification of most all birds in the field. In this latest edition, 7 full plates and more than 20 images (particularly of gulls and estrildid finches) have been replaced, while amendments have been made to dozens of other images. Clearly colored range maps depicting species occurrence are also extensively updated in this edition. Concise but highly

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detailed text descriptions, including information on size, behaviors, abundance, habitat associations, elevational range, and voice, show each species' key identification characteristics in bold. The highly accurate elevational ranges prove particularly useful for separating species in this topographically rugged region. A further useful aspect of this guide, which I wish other guides would adopt, is a "quick index" that is easily accessible on the last page of the book, showing the plate numbers for each major group of birds (e.g., Albatrosses to Wrynecks). This allows one to very quickly navigate to the proper page while working to identify a species. The Introduction provides a thorough but concise overview of the region, with short descriptions and color figures detailing the diverse geography, climate, and habitats. Additional features include a list of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and protected areas, accompanied by a map, and an annotated bird species distributional checklist by country. All in all, this makes for a comprehensive, authoritative, and singular guide to the fantastic birds of the Horn of Africa.

The downsides to this book are few. Nonetheless, there is some room for improvement. First, while the artwork is fantastic overall, some plates for challenging groups like seabirds and raptors could benefit from inclusion of additional plumages and age classes. Furthermore, while the range maps are fairly accurate in more heavily visited areas (namely central and southern Ethiopia), they are less reliable elsewhere. This is not a criticism of the authors, who have done a great job synthesizing existing data, but rather a reflection of the relative paucity of information on bird distributions across large swaths of the Horn. The second edition made significant improvements to the range maps compared with the first edition, and this aspect is likely to further improve as more birders visit and report observations.

Perhaps the biggest opportunity to improve the book is in the structure of the taxonomy and common names used. The guide roughly follows the taxonomy of the African Bird Club (ABC) checklist, which itself is based on the authoritative book series *The Birds of Africa* (Fry et al. 1982–2004). However, as the authors outline in the Introduction, several departures from this checklist have been made. Furthermore, the English common names used are based on those that have traditionally been in use in East Africa, which differ from the ABC checklist in many cases. Overall, the resulting taxonomy and common names don't reflect a singular taxonomic scheme, which seems to create more confusion than benefit. This leads to discrepancies when syncing observations with global checklists and online databases like eBird.

One final criticism is mechanical: While the format and size of the book make for a great, compact field companion, and the pages are made of tough, water-resistant paper, the binding of the book can come unglued after a couple of weeks in the field. This requires maintenance to keep it together and can seriously detract from its otherwise streamlined and field-friendly nature. Hopefully, the publisher can use a tougher binding in subsequent printings.

These minor criticisms aside, this guide is a truly fantastic piece of art and science. The first edition opened the doors to birding in the Horn of Africa, and this updated version represents a significant improvement on what will surely be the standard-bearing guide to the birds of this region for the foreseeable future. It is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in the birds of Africa generally, and is indispensable for anyone with an interest in birds who is planning a trip to the Horn.

For those considering such a trip, Ethiopia is the largest and most ornithologically diverse country in the region, and it has consistently been one of the more politically stable and safe countries to visit in Africa. These characteristics make it the primary birding destination in the region. And for good reason: It has a bird species list in excess of 870 species, paired with spectacular landscapes and welcoming people. However, visitors should not overlook the tiny country of Djibouti, which has unique deserts and tremendous opportunities for observing seabirds, shorebirds, and Eurasian migrants. Furthermore, the self-declared independent Republic of Somaliland, which hosts several endemic bird species, has made tremendous gains in safety and stability over the past decade, making it a potential destination for the intrepid birder. Elsewhere in the region, ongoing political oppression, instability, and/or terrorism risks in Somalia, Eritrea, and Socotra (Yemen) make these countries largely off-limits at the time of writing. However, given the fascinating geography, diverse bird life, and relative safety and stability of Ethiopia and Djibouti, the region should be high on your list for your next trip. And if you do visit, this updated version of *Birds of the Horn of Africa* is a must.

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