

The Birds of Zambia.

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The Birds of Zambia.—Robert J. Dowsett, Dylan R. Aspinwall, and Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire. 2008. Tauraco Press & Aves a.s.b.l., Rue Fusch 3, B-4000 Liege, Belgium (www.aves.be). 606 pp., 38 color plates, 19 black-and-white plates, 7 line drawings and maps, 720 distribution and atlas maps for the 775 species known to occur in Zambia. ISBN 2-87225-005-0. Softcover, \$36.—Zambia, a southern African nation 290,586 square miles (752,614 km²) in area, or approximately the combined area of Texas and South Carolina, was formerly the British colony Northern Rhodesia. This landlocked country is geographically situated entirely within the boundaries of the Tropic of Capricorn and the Equator and is the epicenter of Afrotropical avian endemism. If you happen to be a world bird-lister, your quest for lifers in your ornithological perambulations will almost certainly attract you to Zambia to search for its endemics.

Zambia's bird literature dates back to a descriptive guide by Pitman (1934). The most recent title, *The Birds of Zambia*, is the sixth book on Zambian birds and draws on all past and current literature, with more than 900 published references cited. This book presents, in a well-organized and lucid style, the current status of 775 species known to occur in Zambia, including approximately 100 migrant visitors from the Northern Hemisphere.

This is not a field guide to Zambian bird identification. Although there is an abundance of color photographs of ecosystems and birds in the book, this volume was never intended to be carried in the field as an identification resource. That having been noted, it must be added that the quality of reproduction in the many plates is fine and the color balance accurate; this is particularly evident

in the photographs of the Southern Carmine Bee-eaters (*Merops nubicoides*) clinging to sand banks of the Luangwa River, and in those of the Taita Falcon (*Falco fasciinucha*). The color photographic reproductions of Zambia's varied and unique habitats are equally vivid.

The 38 color illustrations of birds and habitats, five line drawings and maps, and 19 black-and-white photographs provide an accurate and pleasant sense of place, bringing life to the descriptions of the avifauna and its ecology, distribution, and conservation. Little has been published about the history of African ornithology, so the inclusion of a descriptive history of those dedicated individuals who have worked in the field in Zambia, often under difficult circumstances, is entirely appropriate.

The authors are ornithologists who have had experience with African—and particularly Zambian—birds for more than two decades. Their organizational skills in preparation of the book's format allow the reader easy access and quick reference to the voluminous data they have gathered. The range and distribution data, displayed in standard atlas style, are particularly easy to interpret.

The layout closely parallels that of *The Birds of Malawi* (published in 2006, by two of the authors of this title, Dowsett-Lemaire and Dowsett). Zambia and Malawi are geographically juxtaposed, and their avifauna overlaps national political boundaries. Range maps are displayed according to the national occurrence of the many species the countries share, making this publication a necessary companion volume to *The Birds of Malawi*.

Zambia's woodlands, dambos, and dry forest are unique habitats and, like other sensitive environments in Africa, are under constant threat from human encroachment. Zambia lies in the epicenter of the Zambezian region of endemism. As such, the country is home to 57 of the 64 species of birds endemic to this biome. The essential information concerning endemics is important for conservationists and politicians in planning for conservation measures and environmental protection, and for the survival of these species.

This volume brings the status of ornithology in Zambia up to date, and the authors are to be warmly congratulated for their unstinting dedication to African birds. Their seminal work contributes greatly to our knowledge of one of the world's unique biodiverse areas, which holds many avian secrets and where there is a paucity of ornithologists and a plethora of birds. Representing decades of observation and careful documentation, this book belongs on the shelf of every ornithologist seriously interested in African avifauna. Along with *The Birds of Malawi*, it should be made available to students and professional ornithologists in every reputable academic ornithological library. Although this is a reference book and not a field guide, some field observers may very well wish to carry it in the field. If so, the soft cover should be reinforced to ensure durability and longer life.—LARRY SCHWAB, *West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia 26505, USA.* E-mail: larryschwab@verizon.net

LITERATURE CITED

- PITMAN, C. R. S. 1934. A Report on a Faunal Survey of Northern Rhodesia with Especial Reference to Game, Elephant Control, and National Parks. Livingstone, London.