

Birds in Books: Three Hundred Years of South Asian Ornithology—A Bibliography.

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Book Reviews



EDITED BY R. TODD ENGSTROM

The following critiques express the opinions of the individual evaluators regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and value of the books they review. As such, the appraisals are subjective assessments and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or any official policy of the American Ornithologists' Union.

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Essential Ornithology.—Graham Scott. 2010. Oxford University Press, New York, New York. ix + 162 pp., 30 color and 75 black-and-white illustrations. ISBN: 978-0198569978 (pbk). Hardcover, \$110.00; softcover, \$55.00.—Dr. Scott, a comparative avian physiologist, appears to have targeted the interested layperson, student, or scientist, who may have considerable experience observing birds, but who has little academic training in the field. His goal was to give students of ornithology a “way in” to the field of academic ornithology, without competing with longer treatises. In my view, this well-written, short book is very successful in meeting that goal.

The book's seven chapters cover evolution, feathers and flight, migration and navigation, reproduction (including courtship and song), foraging and predator avoidance, and populations/communities/conservation. The author writes in a lively, accessible style, and the well-chosen case studies (effectively illustrated) provide many highlight of the book. There is no bibliography, but “key references” listed in the margin direct the reader to selected studies. I noticed a few typographic errors. A feature that students may find particularly useful is “flight path” boxes in the margins. These provide conceptual links to related topics in other chapters: in the section on physiology and migration in Chapter 3, the flight path points out that birds strategically manage their mass to maximize flying efficiency (Chapter 2). The presentation of concepts in the margins is also helpful (although perhaps some space could have been saved by changing the shape of the various boxes). The overall effect is of a professor adding parenthetical comments to help the students integrate course material and drive home key messages.

Many of the examples given are classic ones such as the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) migratory response to displacement, the mafia-like behavior of parasitic Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), DDT-induced eggshell weakening in Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinum*), and extrapair copulation and sperm competition in birds. Although some are as recent as 2009, others are frequently cited studies from the past several decades. I found myself (an ecologically-oriented ornithologist who has taught ornithology for a number of years) learning new details on topics

such as song development, physiology and migration, and relative hippocampal size in *Paridae* species varying in caching tendencies. The brevity of the book does not allow presentation of opposing viewpoints in most cases. However, I can imagine college (or even high school) students becoming interested in ornithology as a result of reading this book.

Essential Ornithology has created its own niche, quite distinct from the well-known *Ornithology* (Gill 2007). In my opinion, the latter remains the standard for advanced undergraduate/graduate level ornithology courses, given its more thorough coverage of the field and extensive bibliography. However, *Essential Ornithology* reaches a different audience, and I recommend it for community, nature center, and academic libraries, and birders wanting to find out more of how birds live.—TIMOTHY BRUSH, *Department of Biology, University of Texas-Pan American, 1201 West University Drive, Edinburg, Texas 78539, USA. E-mail: tbrush@utpa.edu.*

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Birds in Books: Three Hundred Years of South Asian Ornithology—A Bibliography.—Aasheesh Pittie. 2010. Permanent Black, Ranikhet, India. xxi + 845 pp. ISBN 81-7824-294-X. Rs 795. Distributed by Orient Blackswan Private Ltd. (www.orientblackswan.com).—This volume is an outstanding work of meticulous research documenting for the first time the ornithology of South Asia and nearby political areas: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Tibet. The region encompasses both Oriental and Palaearctic realms.

The Auk, Vol. 128, Number 2, pages 433–436. ISSN 0004-8038, electronic ISSN 1938-4254. © 2011 by The American Ornithologists' Union. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/auk.2011.128.2.433

The published literature on ornithology in the region is vast, spanning almost three centuries and recording over 1,200 species of birds. Aasheesh Pittie points out that as early as 1713–1750, about 15 books relating to South Asian ornithology had been published; this number had soared to over 1,700 by the end of 2009!

In this bibliography, a comprehensive list of books that contain information on the birds of South Asia is provided. Scholarly, popular, as well as relatively obscure texts, are included to present a complete as possible picture of ornithological publications on South Asia. Taxonomic texts dealing with the classification and nomenclature of birds, travelogues, picture books, field guides, works published as monographs within journals, bibliographies, biographies, autobiographies, country handbooks, regional avifaunas, multi-volume ornithological works, art folios, catalogues of museum collections, and simple checklists are all included.

The books are mainly in English, except for certain period literature that is in German, French, Latin, etc. A few works in Indian languages (Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Malayalam, etc) are also included, though the author states that these may not comprise a complete representation of existing work in regional languages.

The general arrangement of the works is alphabetical by author and chronological by year, under author.

Three indices are provided, facilitating easy access to the entries. The first is a general index of places, subjects, and taxa; the second, an index of new names proposed by authors; and the third an index of co-authors and or co-editors.

Twenty-one pages of introduction detail a fascinating chronology of books published on South Asian ornithology and is complemented by an interesting timeline of books from 1713 to 2009 listing the dates of key works.

This bibliography provides a window on a massive bank of scientific and popular knowledge that is invaluable to contemporary ornithologists, both amateur and professional. It is a landmark publication of South Asian ornithology and belongs in all university and museum libraries and in those of anyone with a keen interest in birds in the region.—CAROL INSKIPP, *1 Herneside, Welney, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE14 9SB, United Kingdom; e-mail: inskipp@btinternet.com*.

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Texas Bobwhites: A Guide to Their Foods and Habitat Management.—Jon A. Larson, Timothy E. Fulbright, Leonard A. Brennan, Fidel Hernandez, and Fred C. Bryant. 2010. University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas. 280 pp., 567 color plates, 4 text figures, 2 tables. ISBN 978-0-292-72278-1. Paperback, \$24.95.—For the quail hunter or quail biologist, crop contents provide a snapshot into the life of that bird on an area of land that day. A quail foraging in a habitat is essentially providing an assay of the energy and nutritional value of a habitat at a given point in time. So, more than just fulfilling a natural curiosity to know more about species we manage, food habitats provide important information on

the energy balance of a bird's life from season to season and year to year. *Texas Bobwhites* is a resource for hunters, managers, and biologists to identify quail diet and to help them build an understanding or appreciation of how diets may change with time and management actions.

Texas Bobwhites is an attractive field guide to seeds commonly eaten by bobwhites in Texas as well as providing some management information. The guide is targeted for the hunting audience and, therefore, spends no effort with taxonomic keys for identifying seeds or illustrations to explain what a spikelet, spine, or striation is. However, with 185 species identified, this guide is one of the most comprehensive currently available for any part of the bobwhites' range, and although not exhaustive, provides information on most of the seeds that would be found in quail and dove crops in Texas and much of the southwestern United States.

The book is well thought out, attractive, and appropriately sized for the office or in the field. The authors begin with a brief introduction on the diet and nutritional needs of bobwhite that summarizes much of the key early nutritional research by Dr. Robert Robel, among others. This quick overview of nutrition provides the reader with a basic understanding of the quail's seasonal nutritional and energy needs as well as a perspective on the important habitat needs throughout the year.

The guide is organized by broad classifications beginning with seeds of rushes and grasses, forbs, and finally woody vines, trees and shrubs. Two full pages are devoted to each plant species, which makes room for a range map of its occurrence in Texas, as well as information on the frequency that the species has been reported in quail crops from published diet studies. In addition, there is a basic description of the plant to aid in its identification and the habitat the plant is most often found in. The authors wisely avoided attempting to rank each species value to bobwhites because the opportunistic diet of quail, which varies temporally and spatially, would make any ranking difficult to validate. Although the text is valuable, the true hallmark of this book is the quality of the photographs. Each species has three associated photos, one showing the plant in flower in its typical environment, and two showing the seeds themselves. The images are crisp, high-resolution photographs that clearly depict the seeds in detail and color. I appreciated the way they used a coin as well as a scale that allowed me to quickly gauge the size, color, and texture of the seeds in the context of a known item—perfect for the hunter or biologist not adept at using plant keys that wishes to identify seeds. Readers can pull this book out and, armed with a magnifying glass, compare the seed in question to the pictures in this book. Including cultural management recommendations for producing each of these species—such as response to burning, grazing, disking, fertilization, and planting depth—would have been a nice addition to this volume.

Following the seed guide, *Texas Bobwhites* provides a brief chapter on quail management. This information provides a synopsis of that provided in comprehensive works such as *Bobwhites in the Rio Grande Plains of Texas*, *Texas Quails: Ecology and Management*, and *Beef, Brush and Bobwhites: Quail Management in Cattle County*. The authors point out that they are attempting to peak the readers interest in hopes they will jump off into more quail management literature and to that end they achieved their goal with this section. The final chapter on exotic grasses is a valuable addition to the overall effort and provides specific