

Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World – Non Passerines

By Josep del Hoyo, Nigel Collar, David Christie, Andrew Elliott, and Lincoln Fishpool. 2014. Lynx Edicions, Montseny, 8, 08193 Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain. 904 pages, 145.00 EUR, Cloth.

I am not a fanatic lister, but an observer who religiously keeps notes. When I retired I realised the last time I added up my life list was 40 years earlier. I decided it was time for an update. Using the Sibley and Monroe World List of Bird Names (1999) I tried five times over four years to complete this daunting task. There were many times when it was not clear which

species I saw and I had to undertake much slow, research to resolve each issue.

Now we have a Lynx Edicions version of the world bird list. The authors take 54 pages to review and explain the process that led them to declare one group of birds as a single species. The authors use the Biological Species Concept (BSC relies on defining repro-

ductively isolated populations) along with a scoring system that evaluates differences in morphology, song, ecology and geographical relationships. Using this process they have produced a volume that covers 4,372 extant species of non-passerines (Volume 2 – Passerines will be published in 2016). Also covered are 99 species that have become extinct since 1500, with 50 of them illustrated.

Each entry gives the currently accepted species in English. Then lists the names in French, German and Spanish, as well as alternative common names in English. There is a brief set of taxonomic notes to support the decision to accept species designation. All species have a distribution map and a colour illustration, including distinctive subspecies where appropriate. (The artwork is high quality and mostly taken from the Handbook of Birds of the World series). The index is colour coded to show extant taxa, old or invalid taxa and extinct taxa – a useful idea. There are 34 maps and a full bibliography.

So how useful is this new book? My first thought was to check Hen Harrier. In Europe I had seen these birds hunting mice over upland heath. When I arrived in North America there was a raptor called a “Marsh Hawk.” To me this was a different bird as it was a little grubby in appearance and I typically saw it hunting and catching frogs and snakes over wetlands. The bird’s use of a stall-stopping dihedral was more pronounced. To my surprise this was the same species – *Circus cyaneus*. For 50 years I have waited for an authority to split these harriers in two. Del Hoya and his colleagues have finally taken this plunge.

My next challenge was to review the typical toucans. On every trip to South America I have had to research which species I have seen. Handbook of Birds of the World Volume [Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and Jordi Sargatal (2002), Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain] listed 7 full species. Del Hoya now lists 11 species and it took me a couple of hours to evaluate whether my own notes were correct. (Wikipedia currently lists eight species with 6 sub-species). Where the taxonomy will settle I would hate to guess. At least the issue of whether the Red-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos tucanus*) and Cuvier’s Toucan (*Ramphastos cuvieri*) should be considered species (they are significantly different in their bill colour) I am sure will rage on, because they interbreed freely.

Six years ago I saw and photographed a nightjar in central India. Originally I listed it as a Grey Nightjar (*Caprimulgus indicus*) and not an Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*). My 1999 field guide showed the Grey distributed India-wide. Back in Canada, when I reviewed my notes, I became confused. Handbook of

Birds of the World Volume 5 [Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and Jordi Sargatal (1999), Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain] contained a reference to *Caprimulgus indicus* as the widespread Jungle Nightjar. The Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*) had a similarly broad Indian distribution. Looking at my photo I finally decided my bird was an Indian Nightjar. This new book shows the Grey Nightjar (*Caprimulgus jotaka*) as having a very limited range in north-east India and the Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*) occurring throughout the Indian mainland. This confirms my sighting as an Indian Nightjar – doesn’t it?

My other question was did I miss or misidentify Fork-tailed Swift among the large number of “Palm Swifts” I saw in Mongolia. This book lists Fork-tailed Swift as an alternative name of the Palm Swift subspecies. However one researcher has split this “super-species” into Salim Ali’s Swift, Blyth’s Swift, Cook’s Swift as well as Pacific Swift. This split has been accepted by the International Ornithological Committee (IOC), but not the International Union for Conservation of Nature, nor del Hoya *et al.* (but with five sub-species). For now I am sticking with Palm Swift and del Hoya.

The authors have changed some of the English names too. Why list Peregrine as invalid and replace it with Peregrine Falcon? They retain the old English names of Merlin, Kestrel, Hobby etc. but change Peregrine and Gyr. (To be consistent it should be Merlin Falcon etc.). Original texts do not have this modification (especially as “falcon” is the term for female only). They have also “updated” names like Fea’s Petrel (to Cape Verde Petrel). This could be confused with the Cape Verde Storm Petrel (*Oceanodroma jabejabe*) which is now regarded as a separate species by the British Birding Association and others, but not by del Hoya *et al.* Oh, the joys of taxonomy!

So is this book really useful? Without question it is. It is now the most current and up-to-date checklist of world birds. It has been assembled by people who have spent over twenty years evaluating and deciding the taxonomic issues related to birds. It is a complete checklist of the non-passerine species using the most up-to-date taxonomy. Having both an illustration and a range map alongside of the species entry is a real blessing. It is an essential purchase for researchers and for all those engaged in world-wide birdwatching. Even if you are not a combat lister, you still need to know which species you have seen and where. It will now be my go-to text. There is one critical question. Will Volume 1 be out-of-date before they publish Volume 2?

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