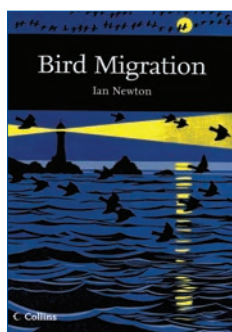


# Reviews



## Bird Migration

By Ian Newton

Collins New Naturalist 113

400pp, colour photos, maps, drawings

Hbk, ISBN 978-0-00-730731-9 Subbuteo code M20524

£50.00 **BB Bookshop price £40.00**

Pbk, ISBN 978-0-00-730732-6 Subbuteo code M20527

£30.00 **BB Bookshop price £24.00**

Ian Newton is one of the most prolific ornithologists of the last 40 years and his fifth book *The Migration Ecology of Birds* (hereafter *MEB*) deservedly won the *BB/BTO* Best Bird Book of the Year in 2008 (not the first time one of his books has been awarded that accolade). He has followed up this triumph with his second tome in the New Naturalist series, a treatise on migration that he presents as an abridged and updated version of *MEB*, albeit with a greater emphasis on Britain & Ireland and ostensibly directed towards a less academic readership. The 25 chapters cover both pattern and process in a similar order to *MEB*. The book begins with an introduction to the different types of migratory movements, the methods used to investigate them, and the principal migration patterns around Britain & Ireland. There follow reviews on more process-based topics dealing with physiology, timing, navigation and the impact of weather, before the latter stages of the book discuss the evolution (past and current) of migratory behaviour, finishing with a discussion of the biogeographical and ecological aspects of bird movements. The book is enlivened by over 200 images of varying quality, some of which are compromised by captioning errors (fig. 26 incorrectly states that White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons* of ssp. *albifrons* have orange rather than pink bills and fig. 45 illustrates a Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* rather than a Common Gull *Larus canus* as captioned), at least some of which I am led to believe are down to errors introduced in the publishing process. Staying on top of the literature in such a big field is no mean feat and some of the papers highlighted were way off my radar; for instance, a Spanish study has revealed age differences in autumn fattening and hence migratory strategy in Savi's Warblers *Locustella luscinioides*, with adults being 'long jumpers' whilst juveniles migrate in 'short hops' to their tropical wintering areas. My

knowledge of physiology is pretty rusty so it was a pleasure to review all the material on magnetoreception and cue-conflict experiments that have driven our understanding of how birds find their way. Any would-be student of migration ecology will find that Ian regularly highlights where the gaps in our understanding lie and which direction our future research efforts should take.

Given my own interests in avian vagrancy, I'm perhaps better qualified to review the accuracy of the ample chapter on vagrancy than the remaining chapters. This is essentially an abridged account of the text from *MEB* but nonetheless does the field justice with a fairly thorough review of the evidence and competing theories constructed to explain the observed patterns of distribution. A minor niggle is the confusion of the status of some rarer species; for instance, the listing of Bluethroats *Luscinia svecica* (along with Northern Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Common Redstarts *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* and Pied Flycatchers *Ficedula hypoleuca*) as a key component of east-coast falls is out of step with that species' current rarity along much of the east coast. Elsewhere, the retraction of the genetic diagnosis of 'Brown' for the infamous British 'southern skuas' was missed and there are *no* rather than 'numerous' spring records of Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* from Fennoscandia. That there are now two British autumn records of Masked Shrike (in comparison with one each from Finland and Sweden and two from Norway) undermines the utility of the 'reverse migration shadow' mechanism initially postulated to explain that species' absence from Britain & Ireland. Given the British and Irish focus in this volume, it is a shame that there are not one or more chapters summarising some of the regional patterns in bird migration, treating flyways such as the Wash-Severn route or comparisons of pelagic seabird distributions between the North Sea and the Atlantic. These minor gripes

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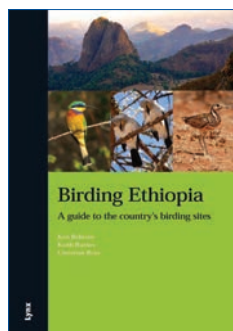
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aside, this book is still a spectacular triumph. Ian's enviable talent for condensing centuries of research into a relatively terse package that reads like the works of the very best popular science authors should earn this volume its place on the

bookshelf of every birder who has ever stopped to ponder the 'hows' and 'whys' of avian migration.

Alexander C. Lees



### **Birding Ethiopia: a guide to the country's birding sites**

By Ken Behrens, Keith Barnes and Christian Boix

Lynx Edicions, 2010

Pbk, 190pp, colour photographs and many maps

ISBN 978-84-96553-55-2 Subbuteo code M20547

£24.99 **BB Bookshop price £22.49**

It was 25 years ago this month that the world's attention turned to Ethiopia, thanks to Bob Geldof and his Live Aid concerts for famine relief. Abiding images of a dusty land and starving people persist in the popular imagination but travelling birders know better.

Ethiopia is a diverse country in the Horn of Africa where habitats range from Afro-alpine moorlands at 4,500 m, to the lowest point on the planet, the scorching Danakil Depression in the Rift Valley at 150 m below sea level, via Rift Valley lakes, temperate highlands and acacia savannah. Ethiopia offers a comprehensive African birding experience with an array of endemic birds such as the curious Stresemann's Bush-crow *Zavattariornis stresemanni*, the fabulous Prince Ruspoli's Turaco *Tauraco ruspolii* and the mythical Nechisar Nightjar *Caprimulgus solala*.

The endangered endemics of southern Ethiopia will justifiably receive far greater prominence as the subject of next month's Birdfair at Rutland Water, but world birders have been seeking them out for more than 20 years. Until now there has been no site guide to aid them in their quest. But, like the proverbial buses, you wait 20 years for a decent site guide and then two come along at once!

The first comes from Lynx Edicions, publishers of the awesome *HBW*. Its authors are a trio of South African birders who lead tours for Tropical Birding. It seems curious that a bird-tour company would give away so much 'gen' – almost like killing the (Blue-winged) Goose *Cyanochen cyanoptera* that laid the golden eggs – but they have generously provided itineraries for 26 sites in Ethiopia. The fact that bird-tour companies have been visiting Ethiopia for more than two decades means that an established 'circuit' has developed for a

three-week tour. Between November and March, when the resident avifauna is swollen by Palearctic migrants, it's possible to see 500 species in three weeks. The Horn of Africa holds approximately 60 endemics, many of them out of reach in lawless Somalia, but a haul of nearly 40 endemics on an Ethiopia tour is possible, including almost all of the 15 species restricted to Ethiopia alone.

*Birding Ethiopia* is divided into three principal sections: the North-west, the Great Rift Valley and the South. The preceding Introduction includes useful information for planning your trip plus sections on biogeography, conservation and taxonomy. But How to Use This Book is the section that contains the key information once birders are on the ground.

The North-west section includes 11 sites, starting in the capital, Addis Ababa, and stretching up to the historic site of Lalibela in the far north. The Great Rift Valley section encompasses seven sites, from the arid Afar Plains and Awash National Park to the Rift Valley lakes and south to the remote Nechisar National Park. The South section (eight sites) takes you from the Bale Mountains through Ruspoli's Country to Yabello. Each site entry lists Key Species, Other Species of Interest, Habitat, Birding, Time (very useful for those on tight deadlines) and Directions. The directions are detailed and make frequent use of GPS co-ordinates and/or distances between fixed points. There are also neat annotated maps for every location. The location accounts are liberally sprinkled with excellent photos of the key species and habitats. Some of these, such as that of the stunning Rosy-patched Bush-shrike *Rhodophoneus cruentus*, are given full-page treatment.

Following the site guide there are a further 26 pages of Speciality Birds (endemics and more widespread species that are difficult to see

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elsewhere in Africa) to remind you what your target birds should be. The book concludes with an Index of Species, which would make a handy checklist for your trip.

*Birding Ethiopia* is an attractively packaged, near-pocket-size book that will prove very useful to birders visiting this wonderful country. My only caveat is the Americanised spellings of bird names,

but that's a minor quibble. And the final test of the authors' selfless intentions? Detailed directions to Prince Ruspoli's Turaco with GPS co-ordinates for one of its favourite fig trees! Pack up your Land Cruiser and get going.

*Adrian Pitches*



## Where to Watch Birds in Ethiopia

By Claire Spottiswoode, Merid Nega Gabremichael and Julian Francis

Christopher Helm, 2010

Pbk, 192pp, colour photographs and many maps

ISBN 978-1408-1-3075-9 Subbuteo code M20671

£19.99 **BB Bookshop price £17.99**

This guide is from the familiar Helm stable of *Where to Watch Birds* guides, which is now expanding beyond Britain and Europe to more far-flung destinations. The three authors all have impeccable pedigrees as experts on Ethiopian birding, including Ethiopia's foremost field birder, Merid Gabremichael. Their deep knowledge and, indeed, deep affection for the country is apparent on every page. And the level of detail is consequently superior to *Birding Ethiopia*.

The Introduction contains more background to Ethiopia's habitats and their birds than the other book and Planning a Trip includes useful pointers on vehicle hire, food and books and maps. There are also contact numbers for hotels on the standard circuit. Both books stress that safety is an issue in outlying areas of Ethiopia. Approaching the Somali border in search of one more endemic is not necessarily a good idea. In the Aims and Scope of their book, the authors state: 'We have taken a pragmatic approach of largely concentrating on sites that are practical to visit in a relatively short visit to the country, and cover the majority of the region's most sought-after species.'

Having said that, *WTWB in Ethiopia* contains twice as many site entries as *Birding Ethiopia*, which is achieved by subdividing the country into eight areas. The bulk of the book is taken up by the Top Fifty Sites, commencing in Addis and its surroundings (eight sites) followed by the North-Central Highlands (five), the Awash Region (six), the Central Rift Valley (eight), the Bale Mountains and Beyond (five), the Southern Lowlands (ten), the South-west (five) and the North (three).

Each regional section opens with a list of locali-

ties and a map with the numbered localities pinpointed. Each locality then has its own detailed map with more numbering of particular landmarks. The authors also use GPS co-ordinates to assist further – but the co-ordinates are not on the requisite page, but clumped together in an appendix; I imagine this could prove rather frustrating in the field. Each site entry contains a description of the site, the key birds, access and what to find where as you bird the area. The text is broken up with numerous photos of the locations and speciality birds; helpfully, all birds mentioned in the text are highlighted in bold so scanning the page for the desired information is made easier.

There are many stunning photographs, including the only known photo of Little Brown Bustard *Eupodotis humilis*, which lurks in far-eastern Ethiopia and Somalia. The Top Fifty Birds section is a photo gallery of Ethiopian endemics and other special birds such as Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs* that make Ethiopia such a magnet for birders. (And, yes, it does include the single wing of the roadkill Nechisar Nightjar that was recovered in 1990 – the only photographic evidence of this enigmatic species.)

After the recent publication of the first field guide to the region (*Birds of the Horn of Africa*, Redman *et al.*, Helm, 2009) and a regional atlas (*The Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea*, Ash & Atkins, Helm, 2009), those wishing to visit Ethiopia are also now very well served with not one but two site guides. For a more detailed guide to the country's birding localities – including the tantalising prospect of new discoveries along the Sudanese border in the far south-west – then I would recommend Spottiswoode *et al.* But Behrens *et al* is

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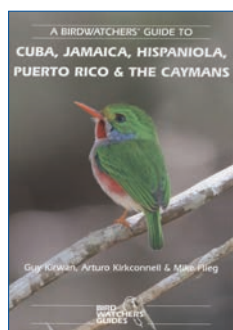
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arguably more user-friendly if you want a handy guide for your backpack. The ideal solution is to take both as they complement each other – and both books are packed with magnificent photos of

the very special birds that make Ethiopia such a must-visit destination.

*Adrian Pitches*



### **A Birdwatchers' Guide to Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico & the Caymans**

By Guy Kirwan, Arturo Kirkconnell and Mike Flieg

Prion, 2010

Pbk, 198pp, many maps and line-drawings

ISBN 978-1-871104-12-7 Subbuteo code M20672

£16.99 **BB Bookshop price £11.00**

Collectively, the Greater Antilles possess over 100 endemics, most of which are confined to just a single island. Of particular interest to students of avian biodiversity are the two endemic families: Todies (*Todidae*) and Palmchat *Dulus dominicus*. This well-produced and competitively priced book will tell you where and how to find them all, as well as many of the region's other birds.

Naturally, being one of a series of birdwatchers' guides, this follows the successful format of earlier volumes. Thus there are introductory chapters on pre-tour and travel information, staying in the Greater Antilles, climate and clothing, general health and safety, books and maps and when to go. These are fortunately brief, answering most of the essential questions a traveller new to the region might ask.

The bulk of the book is devoted to the best birding sites on the islands. The major sites have sections on location, strategy and birds, while accommodation and other wildlife are covered where necessary. Many have large, clearly drawn and very helpful maps. Cuba is exceptionally well covered, not surprising given that one of the authors is Cuban and the other two have visited many times. Cuba has 48 sites covered in 48 pages,

compared with 10 in 22 for the Dominican Republic, 12 in 20 for Puerto Rico and just 6 in 11 for Jamaica. This is not to say that the other islands are anything other than well covered; it is as much a reflection of geography and accessibility of habitat as anything else. Between them these sites hold just about all of the islands' endemic or sought-after birds, along with sufficient information on finding them.

The selected species accounts that follow allow for easy cross-reference to the above sites. These are especially helpful for harder-to-find species and in planning any visit. Finally, there is a comprehensive island-by-island checklist of all species.

In these guides, Prion has found a winning formula and by sticking to the format developed in previous volumes has again come up trumps. This is an exceedingly thorough and well-researched guide, reflecting well the authors' knowledge of and experience in the islands. The few errors are typographical and in no way detract from its usefulness. Despite trumpeting the fact that they have all seen Cuban Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis levis*, they are very vague as to where one might find it. All the other specialities of the region should be findable with the help of this book. It is essential for anyone visiting the region.

*Richard Schofield*

## **ALSO RECEIVED:**

### **Birds of Britain & Northern Europe**

By Peter Goodfellow and Paul Sterry

Beaufoy Books, 2010

Pbk, 160pp; many colour photographs

An easy-to-use and nicely illustrated

identification guide to 280 common species.

ISBN 978-1-906780-12-8

Subbuteo code M20674

£9.99 **BB Bookshop price £8.99**

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Birds migrate to move from areas of low or decreasing resources to areas of high or increasing resources. The two primary resources being sought are food and nesting locations. The term migration describes periodic, large-scale movements of populations of animals. One way to look at migration is to consider the distances traveled. Permanent residents do not migrate. They are able to find adequate supplies of food year-round.