



West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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THE BIRDS OF LIBERIA by W. Gatter (1988) Verh. orn. Ges. Bayern 24: 689-723. Off-print DM6 or US\$5.00 in International Answer Coupons from the author at Buchsstrasse 20, D-7318 Lenningen, West Germany.

Liberia has been much neglected by ornithologists in the past except for fairly recent work on Mt Nimba. However, Wolf Gatter has been generating a lot of interest during the past decade and, helped by the small band of ornithologists there, he has produced a preliminary checklist for the country. Although Liberia lies almost entirely within the lowland rainforest zone, its avifauna is surprisingly rich with 590 species. This list is not annotated, but gives codes for each species to show their status, abundance and distribution. Also given are codes to indicate unresolved questions about the ecology and distribution of each species. A very useful addition to West African ornithology.

H.Q.P. Crick

HAWKS AND OWLS OF THE WORLD; A DISTRIBUTIONAL AND TAXONOMIC LIST by Dean Amadon and John Bull, with THE GENUS OTUS by Joe T. Marshall and Ben F. King (1988) Proc. western Foundation vert. Zool. 3(4): 294-357. \$10.00.

This annotated checklist, co-authored by one of the most respected authorities on avian taxonomy, is available as a well-produced soft-back. A coloured frontispiece of the Neotropical Black Hawk Eagle Spizaetus tyrannus is included together with a coloured plate illustrating endemic island scops owls including the São Tomé Scops Owl Otus hartlaubi.

In an introduction, the overall systematics and guidelines in writing the list are discussed. Particularly interesting are the comments on genera, where reasons for departing from previous classifications are given. This section could valuably have been much longer but readers who require more detail are here referred to the relevant literature.

As Elgood (1988 Malimbus 10: 223-225) notes, The Birds of Africa (Academic Press) stands to become the authority for African nomenclature; as such I have noted below the points where Amadon et al. depart from The Birds of Africa. This list should generate discussion but more importantly may stimulate further research to clarify the status and position of contentious genera and species.

The African Swallow-tailed Kite Chelictinia riocourii is renamed the Scissor-tailed Kite to avoid the suggestion that this species is closely related to the American Swallow-tailed Kite Elanoides forficatus.

Gypohierax angolensis whose alternative common names Palmtree Vulture and Vulturine Fish Eagle reflect the confusion as to its taxonomic position, continues to puzzle and is here moved to be placed between the vultures and serpent-eagles, rather than between the fish-eagles and vultures.

The authors continue to place the Gabar Goshawk M. metabates with the chanting goshawks in the genus Melierax rather than in its own genus Micronisus as adopted in Birds of Africa. The Eastern Chanting Goshawk Melierax poliopterus, is advanced to a full species rather than a race of M. canorus.

The authors differ from Birds of Africa by placing both Wahlberg's Eagle Aquila wahlbergi and the Martial Eagle Polemaetus bellicosus in the genus Hieraaetus. Ayres Hawk Eagle is not listed as Hieraaetus dubius but as H. ayresii.

The monotypic genus Lophaetus is lost by including the Long-crested Eagle with the hawk-eagles in the genus Spizaetus. The Crowned Eagle Stephanoetus coronatus is similarly transferred to Spizaetus.

The final departure of note is that the Barbary Falcon is regarded as a full species Falco pelegrinoides rather than a race of F. peregrinus as more frequently considered.

Turning to the owls, Otus brucei is given the vernacular name Pallid Scops Owl, rather than Bruce's or Striated Scops Owl as Birds of Africa. The African Scops Owl is considered a full species O. senegalensis rather than a race of O. scops.

The Pemba Scops Owl O. pemaensis is not listed. However, Pemba Island is given as part of the range of the Malagasy Scops Owl O. rutilus. One assumes that the authors have included pemaensis with rutilus; differing from its treatment as a valid species in Birds of Africa.

The Desert Eagle Owl Bubo ascalaphus is elevated to a full species distinct from the Eurasian Eagle Owl B. bubo. The recently described Albertine Owlet Glaucidium albertinum is not included in a superspecies with the African Barred Owlet G. capense, although the Asian G. radiatum is.

Comments on the validity of species are less well referenced than those on genera. Why have the authors decided to treat, for example, Falco pelegrinoides and Otus senegalensis as full species? Although these points are discussed by other authors there is no reference to such works here. This aside, the work is important and will undoubtedly serve as an authority on the taxonomy of raptors and owls.