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**Les Oiseaux des Îles du Golfe de Guinée/As Aves das Ilhas do Golfo da Guiné.** By R. de Naurois, 1994. Pp. xxiv + 208, 24 plates. Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, Lisbon. ISBN 972-672-629-8, hardback. Obtainable from Centro de Documentação e Informação do IICT, Rua de Jau 47, 1300 Lisboa, Portugal.

All who have studied the birds of the Gulf of Guinea islands over the last decade or so owe a great debt to the Abbé de Naurois, whose visits to São Tomé and Príncipe in 1963 and 1970-73 have led to the publication of more than 20 papers (with more promised) dealing with the ecology and systematics of their avifauna. Unfortunately, much of this scholarship has appeared in relatively obscure journals. Now in his 90th year, René de Naurois has brought this material together in one volume, covering the three oceanic islands of great interest to ornithologists because of their high levels of endemism. However, most of the material deals with São Tomé and Príncipe; Annobón (where the author never worked) seems almost to have been added as an afterthought, and much of the information for it is incomplete or erroneous (especially status and occurrence: e.g. the endemic race of *Aplopelia larvata* is omitted entirely, and several species are listed as present which have never been recorded there).

An appealing feature of the book is that it is presented as parallel texts in French and Portuguese on facing pages, placing it among the few recent accounts of Gulf of Guinea birds that are accessible to lusophone readers. It begins with an interesting biographical preface by J.C. de Cabral, which provides intriguing glimpses into the eventful life of this mathematician, priest, soldier and ornithologist. Brief geographical descriptions of the islands are followed by a summary of their flora and forest formations, which stresses the islands' botanical uniqueness and sets the scene for the ensuing discussion of the avifauna. There is a short history of early ornithological exploration, and an analysis and checklist of resident species. The bulk of the book, however, comprises species accounts that include information on distribution, food, behaviour and breeding.

Sadly, despite its potential as a coherent résumé of previously published work, and the inclusion of some hitherto unpublished observations, the book has significant faults. Virtually all of the considerable amount of new information obtained from recent visits to the islands by other workers is ignored. An obvious deficiency is the omission of new data on the Dwarf Olive Ibis *Bostrychia bocagei*, São Tomé Fiscal *Lanius newtoni*, São Tomé Short-tail *Amaurocichla bocagei* and São Tomé Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor*, whose recent rediscovery is included only as footnotes, where that of the grosbeak is wrongly credited. The bibliography neglects all but Naurois's own papers: only eight other articles on the islands' birds are listed. Many references are misdated, and many quoted in the text are omitted from the bibliography (including some of Naurois's own publications!), rendering it impossible to trace and check otherwise unsupported statements. The text is full of slips, some serious (e.g. species mis-named, data attributed to the wrong species, previously published information misinterpreted, records mis-dated etc.). An

opportunity to provide a complete review of the avifauna has also been missed, because only breeding species are dealt with and the large number of more or less regular visitors omitted. Misleadingly, a species is marked "absent" in Table 1 if it is not known to breed, and finally, some known or suspected residents (*e.g. Francolinus afer*) are left out.

Because of such errors, the book is dangerous as a work of reference. It is not a field guide either—its large, glossy format precludes that—but until the ECOFAC-sponsored guide to the birds of São Tomé and Príncipe appears, it is valuable as a supplementary guide: it is the only volume to describe and illustrate all of the three islands' endemic birds (and most other residents). However, although a couple of the plates by Marc Chamaillard are engaging in their old-fashioned style, most are naïve and rather obviously painted from skins.

The book is thus a mixture of very valuable field notes and very unreliable reportage: a great contribution but one which must be used with equally great care. But whatever its faults, it will be of interest to all engaged in the natural history of the islands and hopefully to the *sãotomenses* themselves, who still have few other ways of learning about their unique bird-life. Above all, this volume stands to remind us of a remarkable and indefatigable man who has contributed so much to our knowledge of the Gulf of Guinea avifauna.

P.J. Jones & A. Tye

**Woodpeckers. A guide to the woodpeckers, piculets and wrynecks of the world.** By H. Winkler, D.A. Christie & D. Nurney, 1995. Pp. 406, 64 col. plates. Pica Press, Mountfield. ISBN 1-873403-25-9, hardback, £30.

This book does not attempt to compete with Short's monograph on the same group (1982, *Woodpeckers of the World*, Delaware Mus., Greenville), at least not on the taxonomic front. It is, however, also a monograph of a sort, placing equal emphasis on biology and identification and giving much fuller treatment of biological aspects than similar works in this series (or comparable series, *e.g.* Helm). It is also bigger, with smaller print (small than on this page) and scarcely a blank space, so that the amount of information crammed in is phenomenal; other publishers could learn from this. I did not feel that the small type was a disadvantage in a work which is primarily for reference, not leisure reading. The bibliography includes about 600 references to key works, making this a good starting point for investigations into the biology of Picidae.

There are the usual introductory chapters, brief (total c. 30 pages) but wide-ranging and well-referenced, including an interesting one on mechanics (how woodpeckers climb and why they don't get headaches, but the explanation of how they stow the long tongue left me still puzzled). But some of this is highly technical and only likely to be appreciated in full by the professional biologist.