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## Book Review

### **Crows and Jays. A guide to the crows, jays and magpies of the world.**

By S. Madge & H. Burn, 1994. 192 + xxiii pp., 30 colour plates. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 0-7136-3999-7. Hardback £25.95.

This book's emphasis is on identification, not biology; displays, calls, habitat *etc.* are only given insofar as they aid identification. Even breeding data are included because they are "often useful when comparing similar species". Despite this, much interesting biological information is summarized, but this is not a monograph: Goodwin's *Crows of the World* (1986, British Museum (Natural History), London) is not superseded. The book's W. African interest is comparatively limited. Corvid diversity is greatest in Central and S. America, and in S.E. Asia; Africa is relatively poor, and W. Africa has only four species of the world's 120-odd: the Piapiac *Ptilostomus* (spelt *Ptilosomus* in about half of its occurrences in the book) *afar*, Pied Crow *Corvus albus* and two ravens. Like all bird books these days, this one draws attention to conservation aspects, listing threatened species and discussing threats and the action required to avert them.

Hilary Burn's illustrations are super and the layout and conventions used are sensible (*e.g.* vernacular names, amount of detail in descriptions). In places, however, the idiosyncratic English constructions and paucity of punctuation marks cause irritating hesitation in the flow: those split-seconds required to work out the exact meaning. Even a cursory reading reveals lots of typographic slips, some of which could be misleading (*e.g.* Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* is not found in "Las Palmas" (on Gran Canaria) but on the island of La Palma. There are other factual errors (*e.g.* Piapiac eats not oil-palm "seeds" but the pericarp of the fruit).

So what is the market for this book? The style is that of previous Helm guides (*e.g.* the well-used *Shorebirds* by Hayman, Marchant & Prater, 1986), but without the *raison d'être*. The wader-watcher seriously needs *Shorebirds*, but hardly anyone will need this book for crow identification (although it would serve the purpose excellently) because the corvids are dealt with adequately by most regional field guides; few people would want to carry an extra book around the world for such a small group of comparatively easy species. Neither is it aimed at crow biologists. One must therefore conclude that it is primarily for the collector (of books, not crows), of which there are obviously enough these days to support such a project.

Alan Tye