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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest  
Africain**



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## Book Reviews

**Where to Watch Birds in Africa.** By N. Wheatley, 1995. Pp. 432, 51 line drawings, > 100 maps. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 0-7136-4013-8, hardback, £14.99.

Most of the books in the *Where to Watch Birds* series cover a single U.K. county; a few deal with whole countries. The author of this one is attempting to cover a continent, as he has also done for S America. Is it possible to produce a usefully detailed guide in a single book? The author states that he cannot direct a visitor to every site and bird, but is trying to provide a "guiding light". He omits general information of the kind given by travel guides, in favour of information on birds; this is fine, but the bibliography should have included a comprehensive list of travel guides which provide such information, and it doesn't. The logistics sections are cut down to features of interest to bird-watchers (road condition, climate, timing of visits *etc.*) but there are some fatuous hangovers which could have been removed to permit fuller treatment of more countries: the "Accommodation and Food" section consists of statements such as "A variety of food is available in most places, including pasta".

This is very much a book for twitchers; calmer souls may become irritated with the jargon and amused by the listing contrivances expounded (the main reason given for visiting Egypt is to add a few Afrotropical species to one's Palaearctic list). The introduction reviews the continent from this point of view: which countries and sites boast the longest species lists and most endemics, and how many one could expect to see in two or three weeks.

The biggest mistake was to use exclusively English names for the birds, and to take them from Clements (1991, *Birds of the World*, 4th ed. plus 1992 and 1993 supplements). Many of the names in this N American publication differ from those in current use in Africa and it is often impossible to tell what species the author is talking about, without consulting Clements. A list of southern African species with Clements's, "common use" and scientific names is provided, but this should have been provided for the whole continent.

Country accounts make up most of the book; they concentrate on describing the fewest sites which could provide a more or less complete tick-list of endemics and specialities. This usually results in most of each country being ignored although, in addition to the 2-3 major sites discussed for each country, a few others are assigned a few extra lines. Site bird lists (which make up the bulk of the book's text) include restricted-range, rare or little-known species, and a selection of other spectacular or sought-after birds.

Factually, the site accounts seem to match the author's claims (partly because he so circumscribes them), although there are errors and many over-generalizations. Perhaps the most misleading group concerns site access: many of the sites described are restricted, or open only with permission; this is not always stated, or one is told to ask permission but not where or who to ask. Although the book

might help to promote conservation by increasing eco-tourism, it could also have a negative effect, by bringing birders into conflict with local authorities.

Country coverage is highly uneven. Kenya gets the most pages (26, with most of its sites getting more space than entire W African countries), while Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau get least (1.5 pages each—bear in mind that half a page for each country is a map). Three countries are omitted (Western Sahara, Lesotho, Swaziland) despite the claim that two of them are included in the South Africa account (they aren't). Countries with <10 pages are not covered adequately, and that applies to 19 of the 24 W African states. It is astonishing that countries like Cape Verde (2), Ghana (2, with a map that shows none of the sites mentioned) and Mali (3.5) are dismissed so briefly. It is precisely such poorly known countries that need a guide of this kind. In W Africa, the guide only approaches adequacy for Cameroon (16), Gabon (14), Gambia (10) and Ivory Coast (12).

This latter selection reveals the book's main purpose: to describe the smallest number of sites which would enable a lister to get the birds of a region most easily. The book is definitely not a guide to a selection of the best places in every country in Africa. So it is only worth buying if you suffer from a twitch and want to know which countries to visit to get your lifers fastest, or if you happen to be visiting some of the better-covered countries. For any of the others, it would be possible to make notes very quickly from a library copy, or standing by the shelves in the local bookshop. Even for the more fully-treated countries, the amount of information presented inevitably falls short of that in country checklists or guides, which are available for many countries in Africa. Still, non-listers, planning a less single-minded holiday, might find it useful as a selective guide to a few sites not dealt with by general guidebooks, which could add interest to the trip.

Alan Tye

**Les Oiseaux de l'Archipel du Cap Vert/As Aves do Arquipélago de Cabo Verde.** By R. de Naurois, 1994. Pp. xvii + 188, 10 colour plates. Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, Lisbon. ISBN 972-672-628-X, hardback. Obtainable from Centro de Documentação e Informação do IICT, Rua de Jau 47, 1300 Lisboa, Portugal.

**The Birds of the Cape Verde Islands.** By C.J. Hazevoet. Pp. 192, 48 colour plates. Check-list 13, British Ornithologists' Union, Tring. ISBN 0-907446-17-5, hardback, £17.

The Cape Verde Islands are of interest because they lie on the western margin of the Old World, in the region where the Palaearctic and Afrotropical biota overlap