



**West African Ornithological Society  
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest  
Africain**



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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.

Some 230 pages are devoted to the species texts, which are set out much as in *The Birds of Africa* (Fry *et al.* 1988, vol. 3, hereafter "BoA"), with sections on identification, distribution, movements, habitat, descriptions voice, habits, food, breeding and references. West Africa is moderately rich in species: two wrynecks *Jynx*, a piculet *Sasia*, nine *Campethera*, 11 *Dendropicos*, and one *Picoides*. The texts are quite full and I spotted few errors or misinterpretations, although one might question some statements, such as the records of *Sasia* from Ghana and Nigeria being of "abnormally long-distance dispersal" in what is probably quite a sedentary species and which is notoriously hard to see. One remarkable oversight is the irregularity of comment on status and conservation. Some species have a sentence or two, others nothing at all, even some well-studied ones. The accompanying maps, on the other hand, contain many errors (some traceable to BoA!), and are hard to read because not enough underlying detail is included (*e.g.* no political boundaries).

The clear and spacious, field-guide fashion plates, by Nurney, show all species in a precise, attractive style, and include a range of subspecies at the expense of immature plumages. They seem generally accurate, although the greens and golden-greens are too dull, and some of the browns not quite right — rather important for *Campethera* and *Dendropicos* spp.

Although this is one of the best books of its type that I have come across, to have a real use to most people, such a book should present a level of detail greater than can be found in regional works, because most people are more interested in a regional avifauna than a worldwide group of birds. So, although this book deals with all the world's woodpeckers, I personally would consult BoA for information on African species, or *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Cramp *et al.*, Oxford Univ. Press) for European ones; both these works are more detailed than the present book. Therefore, although there may be more buyers in regions with fewer competing books (Asia, S America?), I suspect that the real market here will again be bird book collectors, who may not care greatly about the precise content.

Alan Tye