



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



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summary table showing which tests to use for which kinds of data; if this could be included in a reprint, and all those irritating little errors corrected, I would give it an unqualified recommendation.

Alan Tye

**Pittas, Broadbills and Asities.** By F. Lambert & M. Woodcock, 1996. 271 pp., 24 col. plates, numerous maps and line drawings. Pica Press, Mountfield. ISBN 1-873403-24-0, hardback, £26.

Of the 32 pittas, 15 broadbills and four asities, only two pittas and four broadbills occur in West Africa. This is largely a S.E. Asian group of birds with its present centre of diversity in the Sundas, but the relationships of the outlying species are intriguing and current theories are discussed at length.

The layout and content of this book are like those of other Pica volumes (see review, *Malimbus* 18: 64-65) with much identification information, but this one also has more than the usual amount of biology. It is also bang up to date, with lots of recent, unpublished information obtained from a wide circle of correspondents and colleagues. There is here everything you could want to know about these birds — as far as it is known, that is; this is a true, scholarly monograph. For African species, there is much more detail than found in *The Birds of Africa* (Keith *et al.* 1992, Academic Press, London), with ranges mapped more precisely. However, there are some errors; for example, the map for Grey-headed Broadbill *Smithornis sharpei* has the West Cameroonian range shifted into Nigeria. The maps really should have included country boundaries for ease of reference: these are much better known than the major rivers which are the only other point of reference shown on the maps, and showing boundaries would probably have avoided the errors mentioned above.

I found the plates rather disappointing and not up to Woodcock's usual standard, although they are adequate for identification purposes. They are more artificial-looking than alive, and the ones of pittas rather dull for such a strikingly bright group of birds.

But these complaints are comparatively minor: overall this is a fine monograph in the best tradition. As always with such books, I doubt that sufficient people really need it (as opposed to people who don't but who will buy any bird book), to create the market to permit publication; but if a market exists, for whatever reason, so much the better, for such works are of great value to the few specialists who do really need them and would not otherwise get them.

Alan Tye