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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
Africain**



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Reviews — Revues

The Birds of São Tomé and Príncipe with Annobón, islands of the Gulf of Guinea, by P. Jones & A. Tye, 2006. 172 + xix pp., 34 col. plates. Checklist 22, British Ornithologists' Union, Oxford. ISBN 0-907446-27-2, hardback, £30 (incl. postage) from <www.bou.org.uk>.

When beginning a study of the birds of a poorly known region, having a BOU checklist is an invaluable help. Thanks to the work of Peter Jones and Alan Tye, we now have available Checklist 22, for São Tomé, Príncipe and Annobón, islands of the Gulf of Guinea. These three islands plus Bioko and continental Mt Cameroon make up a volcanic archipelago along a SW–NE fracture in the earth's crust.

The book follows the format of the checklist series, beginning with interesting introductory chapters on climate, physical and human geography, and the avifauna (annual cycles, ecology, conservation etc.). It then details, species by species, each and every known piece of information regarding presence, reviewing the entire known bibliography and supplementing this with unpublished data. This is without doubt a luxury for those who may have the opportunity to study the birds of these islands.

São Tomé, Príncipe and Annobón have been included by BirdLife as Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs) and as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Despite their total area amounting to only a little more than 1000 km² (scarcely 35 x 35 km), the three islands possess more than 70 landbird species, including four endemic genera, 18 endemic species and 13 additional endemic subspecies. To these high endemism figures can be added the importance of the seabird populations which breed on their cliffs and islets.

The three islands were uninhabited when discovered by Portuguese navigators, and the story of their birds curiously approaching the first observers to land on the islands now seems fabulous. Five centuries later, the vegetation has been radically transformed, above all into cocoa plantations, and the human population density has become among the highest in Africa.

This new work by Jones and Tye complements the field guide by Patrice Christy and W.V. Clarke (1998, *Guide des Oiseaux de São Tomé e Príncipe*, ECOFAC), and results in the avifauna of the Gulf of Guinea becoming among the best known in Africa. However, whoever may have the good fortune to visit the islands, will almost certainly still be able to uncover many unknown facts about the status and biology of their spectacular birds.

Jaime Pérez del Val