



## Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 6: Mousebirds to Hornbills (Handbook of the Birds of the World)

*By Josep Del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott, Jordi Sargatal*

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This is the 6th of the multi-volume series designed to provide the first comprehensive account of all the species of birds in the world. This volume covers from Mousebirds to Hornbills. Each chapter, headed by a summary box, deals with a different family, and it is subdivided into sections: systematics; morphological aspects; habitat; general habits; voice; food and feeding; breeding; movements; relationship with man; status and conservation; a general bibliography and detailed species accounts. The species accounts include names in French, German and Spanish, in addition to scientific and English names. Each species features taxonomic notes; subspecies and distribution; habitat; food and feeding; breeding; movements; status and conservation and a selected bibliography.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

In the meantime, BirdLife International and Lynx Edicions of Barcelona have been moving right along with their monumental handbook of the world's birds. Volume 5 contains the owls, nightjars and relatives, and the swifts and hummingbirds. Volume 6 is even more delectable: mousebirds, trogons, and the Coraciiformes: kingfishers, todies, motmots, bee-eaters, rollers, ground- and cuckoo-rollers, hoopoes and woodhoopoes, and hornbills. How's that for a collection of exotic birds in one place?

Scott Swengel recently pointed out in *Birding* that this treatment of the world's owls is rivaled only by the owl volume from the Christopher Helm family series. If that is true of this relatively well-studied group of some 200 species, how much more true is it of the 328 hummingbirds for which this same volume provides the only complete, accessible, modern, illustrated treatment currently available? Almost worth hauling along on your next trip to Latin America!

Although the species accounts and color plates are of consistently high quality, the special features of these volumes are the family introductions and the spectacular photographs. A bonus is provided by the forewords: a cogent and useful essay by Nigel Collar on "Risk Indicators and Status Assessment in Birds" in Volume 5 and a lively and informative essay on "Avian Bioacoustics," drafted by Luis Baptista and completed after his death (and as a tribute to him) by Donald Kroodsma.

Another introductory essay to Volume 6 explains how it was originally intended to wrap up the non-passerines with jacamars through woodpeckers, now slated to form the contents of a new Volume 7. This would not be the first time that one of these major handbook projects has grown in size in the course of its lifetime. Nevertheless, the publishers are concerned enough about this expansion to ask readers and purchasers whether they want the series cut back to the original dimensions, presumably by reducing the space allotted to the passerines. That would be a pity, of course, but there are major economic issues involved, and it is only too easy for a freeloading reviewer to cast a vote for expansion; I hope the paying customers do likewise! Eric Salmanz -- *Winging It, Volume 13, Number 7, July 1, 2001*

There was a time when it would have seemed inconceivable that a book - or even a series of volumes - covering the world's birds could be truly comprehensive, and something to be treasured as much by the scientific community as by amateur birders. But *Handbook of the Birds of the World* has achieved just that. Always an ambitious project and, just as BWP did, now starting to extend beyond the original parameters set by the publishers. HBW has captured the imagination of the birding public. It's an awesome task to attempt to catalogue all of the world's bird species in such a detailed, methodical way, but each of the five preceding volumes has done so admirably.

A riot of colour The long-awaited sixth volume, finally published in early spring this year, improves the standards set by its predecessors. The species featured help in no small way: though the volume title itself may not look inspiring, the families include trogons, kingfishers, todies, motmots, bee-eaters, rollers, ground-rollers and Hoopoe - in fact, a riot of colour and interest among which mousebirds and hornbills are to my mind outshone by their relatives.

A fascinating extended foreword on avian acoustics, by Donald Kroodsma and the late Luis Baptista, precedes the introduction and the true meat of this volume - detailed accounts which cover a total of 258

species. The order of the book is structured around sections on each of the 12 featured families, covering subjects such as systematics, morphology, habitat, general habits, voice, food, breeding, movements, relationship with man, and status and conservation. This informative narrative is followed by fairly concise accounts which provide key information on each species: taxonomy, subspecies and distribution, descriptive notes, habitat, food and feeding, breeding, movements and status and conservation are all covered in detail. Each species account is also accompanied by a distribution map and bibliography.

The species are illustrated with a successful combination of both photographs and plates. The photos, which feature in the narrative section for each family, seem to be increasing in both number and quality with each volume, and with such photogenic subjects this edition's selection are particularly outstanding. I could easily list 20 personal favourites, from the sequences of a diving Kingfisher (page 153) to the courtship-feeding Lilac-breasted Rollers (page 358), but every reader will doubtless have their own. The very attractive plates, which follow in the individual species accounts, are by such accomplished artists as Hilary Burn, Richard Allen, Tim Worfolk, Chris Rose and Jan Wilczur. For some species not covered elsewhere by recent identification handbooks or field guides, these are easily the best treatments. Subspecies are well depicted, though immature plumages are not.

Overall, the 600-odd pages of text and illustrations can engross you for as long or as little as you want - this is absorbing science for the dedicated ornithologist, or high-brow gloss for those who don't get beyond the pictures. HBW is genuinely hard to fault. I could be unnecessarily picky about the editing in one or two places, point out the odd literal, and certainly mention the smudged printing of text on two pages which should not slip through on a £110 book (but perhaps that's just my review copy). Fundamentally however, Lynx Edicions has done a near-perfect job in publishing this series - perhaps too much so, according to the introduction. This volume should have been the last covering non-passerines, but with so much material and rising costs, all species from jacamars to woodpeckers have been kept back to form a separate volume 7, and passerines move back a notch to start at volume 8.

With other volumes in the pipeline presumably also having the potential to expand in the same way, HBW may continue to grow in both number of volumes and cost to readers - and at 110 a throw that's a lot of extra money. But then I can think of few better ways to spend it: HBW is the definitive bird book. Dominic Mitchell -- *BirdWatch*, May 1, 2001

Volume 6 of this amazing series of books, documenting the birds of the world, continues to set the standard for authors and researchers who wish to summarize and present information to an informed public. Many books exist that speak to one or more species/groups of birds or that try to define birds, behaviour and/or distribution geographically. Anyone who has ever worked on a "local" guide knows how difficult it can be - try doing it for all the birds in the world! The editors have undertaken this task and once again their efforts and the results show in the quality and scope of the book.

This ambitious project was initiated approximately nine years ago and has involved an expert team of editors, an Editorial Council, and in the case of Volume 6, 13 world experts who have authored individual species accounts. Volumes 1 through 5, covering Ostrich to Ducks, New World Vultures to Guinea fowl, Hoatzin to Auks, Sandgrouse to Cuckoos, and Barn-owls to Hummingbirds respectively, set the framework for this volume. In a thoughtful statement in the Introduction, the Editorial Council lament their options, in that their nucleus of contacts and the information available to them increases exponentially as the years go by. This means that they simply have too much information at their disposal to adhere to their original publication plan. So, rather than edit or cut text, they have split the current volume into two books, this one and Volume 7 to be published next year. This will allow presentation of the most thorough and informative volumes to readers rather than shaving available information.

As in the past, the volume begins with a foreword and introduction, including the usual thanks and acknowledgements. Continuing the pattern of providing a wealth of useful information, the editors have included a 43 page paper on Avian Bioacoustics by the late Luis F. Baptista and Donald E. Kroodsma. Ever wonder how a starling can mimic so many bird songs, how a mockingbird remembers its songs, how birds use their feathers to make sounds, why a bird can sing ..... Well, this essay will provide many of the answers while covering subjects including bioacoustics, how birds produce and perceive sounds, how sounds develop in individuals, the function of sound, and the evolution of sounds. In summing up this paper, the author advises that "In every scientist who studies bird song, however, there lies a poet...". Maybe now one can better understand not only why the songs we hear are wonderful to listen to, but how and why they are functional. Just in case you think the Editorial Council includes these forewords as filler material, the authors have included 483 references in support of the article! The article is further supplemented with beautiful paintings, photographs, tables, and graphs.

The rest of the book offers a detailed compilation of information related to every species of mousebird, trogon, kingfisher, tody, motmot, bee-eater, roller, ground-roller, cuckoo-roller, hoopoe, woodhoopoe, and hornbill. The section dealing with each family begins with several pages of text, interspersed with numerous high quality photographs of the species discussed. These articles are concise, instructive, and detailed. For example, the section on kingfishers is 57 pages long and discusses systematics, morphology, habitat, general habits, voice, food and feeding, breeding, movements, relationship with man, status and conservation, and a general bibliography, all highlighted with 87 spectacular colour photographs! Every family covered in the book is equally detailed.

Following these introductory sections, individual species accounts for every species known, including extinct or potentially extinct species, are presented. Each species account includes information on taxonomy, distribution (supplemented with an excellent range map), description, voice, habitat, food and feeding, breeding, movements, status and conservation and a specific bibliography. The colour plates produced to support the information in the text are again of superior quality and detail. Wherever possible the most similar members of the tribe or genus are depicted on the same plate. In keeping with the modern ideal with respect to field guides, several views of the birds are shown on each plate. For example, the three plates on bee-eaters depict 25 species, but show 53 individual views of males, females, and certain subspecies. When it is all added together, hundreds of paintings and approximately 380 photographs and 5600 references supplement the 257 species accounts. I do wonder why so many blank pages (23) are interspersed through the book. Obviously they divide sections, but I would have preferred a photograph or something more eye-pleasing than a stark white page in these instances.

It is difficult to find real fault with this book. It is well presented, detailed, inclusive, and instructive. However, I continue to wonder why none of the colour plates show juvenal or immature plumages. Some juveniles are included in the many photographs supporting each family discussion, but additional depictions in the plates would be helpful, particularly where the young are dissimilar to the adults. I recently had the opportunity to study many of the species covered in this volume while in Kenya, and remain impressed with the accuracy of the information, the range maps, and the commentary supplied. If the entire book is as accurate as the entries for which I have personal experience, it truly is a masterpiece! In general, the book is extremely current and includes not only much of the most recent information on all known species, but also up to date information on new species recently discovered or split from other species. For example, the Eurasian, Madagascar, and African forms of Hoopoe are considered by many to be separate species. The authors recognize this, and discuss the pros and cons of splitting or lumping these forms in some detail.

I was so truly impressed with this series that I "needed" to have all the books in the series, so I bought the ones I was missing and now own all six volumes. I thought this might upset my wife, who tends to spend money on frivolous things, like mortgages, food, and clothing, but she spent much more time looking

through the book and praising its content and format than I had expected! One of my close friends was equally impressed by finally being able to solve an old mystery: he had travelled to Africa a few years ago and had video-taped a hornbill that he was unable to identify. Thanks to this book he finally knows that he saw a Long-tailed Hornbill.

The thoroughness and presentation of this book continue to impress me, and I look forward to the concluding volumes in the series. This remains one of the most amazing books that I have had the pleasure to study and should be included in every serious birder's library! Geoffrey Carpentier -- *Birders Journal*, Vol.10(3): 142-143, June 1, 2001

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