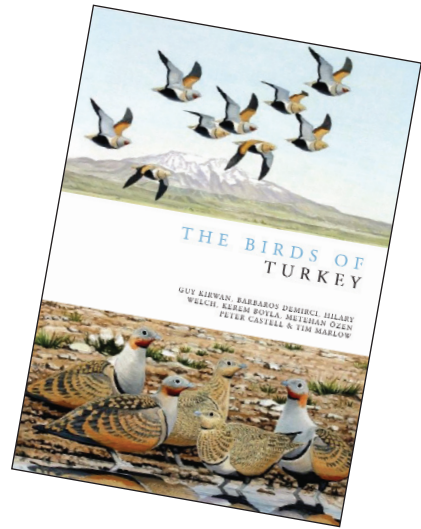


# REVIEW

## The Birds of Turkey

Guy M Kirwan, Barbaros Demirci, Hilary Welch, Kerem Boyla, Metehan Özen, Peter Castell & Tim Marlow  
Christopher Helm/A & C Black. 2008.  
512 pages, 32 colour plates, distribution maps.  
Hardback. £40.00  
ISBN 978-1-4081-0475-0



Like many of us who visit Turkey regularly, the chance sighting of something that might be a little unusual causes me to consult Cees Roselaar's excellent *Songbirds of Turkey: Atlas of Biodiversity of Turkish Passerine Birds* (Helm, 2000).

On a recent March trip to Turkey I visited a beach east of Finike in Antalya province. I encountered Horned Larks *Eremophila alpestris*, which are common in Turkey but usually on steppe and generally at a high altitude. Were these Turkish breeders or could they possibly be wintering or migrant birds that breed further north? Plumage characters suggested they might not be Turkish breeders and it did not look from Roselaar's book as if there were records of birds that were not Turkish breeders. The point is that Roselaar's book has been something of a bible as it has provided detailed information on the taxonomy and distribution of all passerines found in Turkey, and to a generally high level of accuracy. A single volume source has not been available for non-passerines so it is a great pleasure to see the appearance of *The Birds of Turkey* as the species accounts now bring together a single reference source for all species. This alone makes this book indispensable.

The details provided within the species accounts are generally excellent and, within the constraints of coverage issues, are very good. The maps are clear and I think pitched at the right level. There are such huge gaps in distributional knowledge for many birds that a large amount of the 'black' or 'grey' must be deduction though this guesswork appears to have been conducted critically and with due care. I have been leading tours to areas rich in flora and butterflies and this I feel has given

me an insight into the wider avifauna of Turkey in the sense that I spent a lot of time off the beaten track, at least as far as birders are concerned. In fact, I have rarely met other birders in the field in Turkey in the past fifteen years. Certainly I can see few flaws in the species accounts of the mountain passerines of the east which, in my experience, are all really rather common if one spends time in the right habitats, and the species accounts more or less indicate this.

The choice of introductory chapters is worthy of comment. Sections on 'Modern Ornithology in Turkey', the very honest and welcome 'Gaps in our Knowledge' and the summary descriptions of 'Turkey's Ecoregions' are excellent in aim and, with the exception of the last, execution. The section on 'The Breeding Season' is oddly placed, perhaps this could have been an appendix, with the addition of sections giving overviews on 'Migration' and 'Population Trends'.

The description of Turkey's ecoregions is important and necessary and is generally at about the right level, each region's physical and vegetation characteristics, and the reason for their distinctiveness, given succinctly without encumbering us with unnecessary detail. However there are some careless errors here. Describing the Taurus and southwest Anatolia as supporting c950 plant species is rather wide of the mark, we could fairly aim to find that in a two week tour of the region. Rather worryingly, the Black Sea mountains are described as being 'geologically young having started in the last 5000-6000 years'.

Mountain building in this region started around 35 million years ago (late Eocene/Oligocene) and continued until as recently as about 3 million years ago (Pliocene). The description of the Zagros mountains contains much dubious description to areas around Shiraz (Iran) and beyond, and the mention of Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus* as a part of what presumably should be a typical Zagros mountains fauna is unrepresentative. There is a remnant and very isolated population of this species in a remoter part of the Sistan Baluchistan mountains, which though a continuation of the same mountain arc that formed the Zagros, can hardly be called part of the Zagros. As far as I know the Asiatic Black Bear has not occurred historically in the Zagros, which are however occupied, rather sparsely, by Brown Bears *Ursus arctos*.

The photograph section is largely good but what is worrying is the number of duds. The Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta* has twigs across its head and its eye is obscured. The many landscape shots are useful and generally well chosen but again there are some unaccountably poor ones such as the Sivri Kaya shot which illustrates perfectly the impact of sunlight on the landscape.

It would be interesting to map the recording activities of birdwatchers, Turkish and foreign, over the past forty years. In fact, I find it rather strange that this hasn't been at least attempted as in other fields such as Lepidoptera, where Hesselbarth *et al's* magnum opus (*Die Tagfalter der Türkei unter Berücksichtigung der angrenzenden Länder*. Wagener, 1995) not only provides detailed maps for the collections and sightings of all butterflies recorded in Turkey but it also maps the movements of the collectors in detail showing clearly the areas where they have not spent much time or indeed ventured at all.

Overall the drawbacks are few and the book delivers well in terms of providing a thorough resource for information on the birds of Turkey. Anyone with a significant interest in the avifauna of this region will do well to get this book and will be pleased with what they get. The authors have done a very good job. However, I am left with a question. When will the database that this book provides be on the web?

Ian Green

A web page has been set up to disseminate updates and corrections to *The Birds of Turkey*, at <http://www.freewebs.com/guykirwan/turkeybookupdates.htm>.

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## OSME NEWS

Geoff Welch

### Conservation and Research Fund changes

The following important changes have been made to the operation of the Conservation and Research Fund which should be noted by all applicants.

From 1 January 2009, applications will be considered three times a year with the following deadlines for submission: 31 January, 31 May and 30 September. Applicants will be notified of the decision within 3 months of the deadline *ie* in April, August and December. Therefore, please allow sufficient time between your application and the proposed timing of work.

All applications are considered by the Conservation and Research Fund sub-committee, currently Ramaz Gokhelashvili (Caucasus), Michael Brombacher (Central Asia), Richard Porter (Middle East), Rob Sheldon (Scientific Adviser) and myself, with recommendations endorsed by OSME Council.

In order to support as many applications as possible, grants will be limited to a maximum of £500 but this will be reviewed on a regular basis depending on the success of fund raising activities.

Projects should be directed to one or more of the following subject areas: