

# REVIEWS

## Cyprus Bird Report 2010

BirdLife Cyprus. 2011.

Softback. 206 pages, colour photos, graphs and tables.

£12

Available from OSME Sales



This, in many ways bumper, issue of the Cyprus Bird Report not only includes the exhaustively detailed and *de rigueur* systematic list, but also has editor Colin Richardson's month-by-month overview of the birding year, as well as a series of short articles. These latter cover three additions to the island's bird list made during the year under review, a Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*, a White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis* and a group of five Crimson-winged Finches *Rhodopechys sanguineus*. Contrary to popular belief that might consider the peaks of spring and autumn migration to be the times to search for vagrants new to Cyprus's list, all of these were found in winter (in late November to early January). The remainder of the articles presented here cover autumn migration of waterbirds along the island's northern coast, the status of Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* on Cyprus since the early 1990s, and disturbing reports on the effects of the recent drought in Africa on Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* and other sub-Saharan migrants, as well as the apparent decline in one of the island's two breeding endemics, the Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax*. A nice series of colour photographs, the annual ringing report, and colour maps showing the location of some of Cyprus's best birding sites, which adorn the inside front and back covers, round off this volume. Cyprus 'regulars' will already be confirmed readers of the annual report, but even potential one-off visitors will find something of interest herein.

Guy M Kirwan

## Biodiversity Conservation in the Arabian Peninsula: Zoology in the Middle East Suppl 3

Kasperek Verlag. 2011.

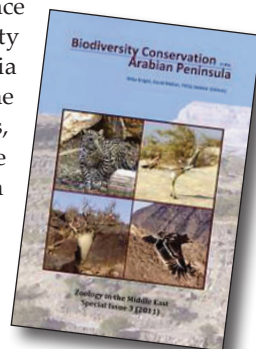
Hardback. 208 pages, colour and black-and-white photos, tables, maps and graphs.

€28

Available from Kasperek Verlag, [www.kasperek-verlag.de](http://www.kasperek-verlag.de)

This special issue of *Zoology in the Middle East* is edited by Mike Knight, David Mallon and Philip Seddon, and comprises a series of specially invited contributions covering themes from a conference devoted to biodiversity conservation in Arabia held in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, in February 2010. The papers (all of which are also available for free .pdf download at the Kasperek Verlag website) are broken into three sections: 'regional approaches' (three contributions), 'species approaches' (six) and 'methodologies' (five). Three papers, one in the first and two in the second category, focus explicitly on birds (avian flyways in Arabia, satellite tracking of a Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, and population structure and migratory connectivity of MacQueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* populations). However, it is a paper in the first section, the longest indeed of the entire volume at 57 pages, which is of greatest personal interest and whose contents will occupy the rest of this review.

Entitled "Past and present human impacts on the biodiversity of Socotra Island (Yemen): implications for future conservation", the contribution by Kay Van Damme and Lisa Banfield is a wide-ranging yet detailed but in parts dispiriting review of the prospects for wildlife conservation on this, the largest island in the Arabian sea region. Following



an introduction to the biodiversity of the archipelago, the authors go on to separately describe pre-21st century and current century human impacts on wildlife. They highlight how such impacts have been surprisingly limited until very recently, largely as the result of traditional practices (including transhumance) having been maintained until around the 1970s, if not later, and how some equilibrium between introduced and exotic animals and plants, including goats, a frequently very harmful presence for island biota, has been achieved, in part through their length of occupancy. Van Damme and Banfield emphasise throughout their communication that no extinctions have yet been recorded among well-studied taxonomic groups such as birds, molluscs and reptiles. While the authors repeat that many other groups still require much basic research, including the description of taxa, it might also be noted that a serious reappraisal of alpha taxonomy in birds has only been attempted within the course of the last decade and is still ongoing.

Thereafter, the two authors go on to quantify the major individual threats to the archipelago's biodiversity as of today, unleashed as the result of "an anthropogenic tsunami [that] currently seems to be sweeping over Socotra"; frightening words indeed. They describe and discuss the impacts, sometimes intertwined, of pollution/waste, tourism (a major threat that could scarcely have been envisaged until recently, even in 1993 when I visited the island as part of the OSME survey), the illegal trade in biota, habitat degradation, agriculture, habitat fragmentation, natural factors such as climate change, and species introductions (which already number about 100, despite examples of firm action in the face of such arrivals, most notably the recent eradication of the House Crow *Corvus splendens*). Perhaps surprisingly, climate change could wreak amazing havoc on an already largely arid ecosystem, in large part because the few 'wet refugia' on the islands, which are mini islands of endemism, could easily be eliminated as a result.

Before they close, with an overall appraisal of the possibilities for ecosystem-level conservation, which they consider essential and to depend on harnessing and developing traditional Socotri values and

traditions, Van Damme and Banfield provide a couple of examples of encouraging work to preserve the environment, and a comparison with the study, conservation and threats to biodiversity on Ecuador's Galápagos islands. Rather selfishly, I rather hope that at least one comparison between these two island groups—in the number of tourist visitors—never comes to pass. Long may Socotra remain (almost) as magnificent and wild as it was just 17 years ago at the time of the OSME survey, never mind at the time of first human arrivals (in the Lower Stone Age, c1.4–2.5 mya), though time for such delight in the islands' relatively near-virgin state is unfortunately rapidly running out.

Guy M Kirwan

### **Priority! The dating of scientific names in ornithology: a directory to the literature and its reviewers**

Edward C Dickinson, Leslie K Overstreet, Robert J Dowsett & Murray D Bruce (eds). 2011

Hardback. 320 pp + CD-ROM with 160 pp of supporting data.

£80 + £7.50 post & packing

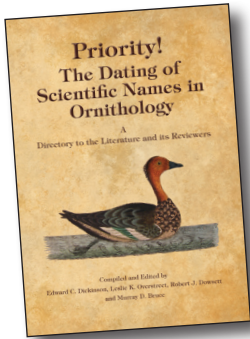
Available from Aves Press, Flat 3, 19

Bolsover Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex

BN20 7JG, UK. info@avespress.com

This book is an important contribution to the literature on what most readers of *Sandgrouse* will consider to be, I suspect, a relatively esoteric subject of fundamentally marginal interest. In contrast, for some researchers, be they studying ornithological taxonomy, nomenclature or bibliography, *Priority!* should be viewed as nigh-on essential. It also serves, as the work's principal compilers explain, as the detailed underpinning to the dating of many scientific names in the forthcoming fourth edition of the Howard & Moore world checklist (which is likely to succeed the Peters checklist among academic ornithologists).

In addition to the book, which comprises three main sections, there is also a CD-ROM of supplementary material. The first part of the book includes an introduction to the ICZN Code's stipulations concerning the priority of scientific names, followed by an apparently exhaustive discussion of printing processes and the keynote terms that will



be used throughout the rest of the work, as well as a résumé of the compilers' sources and resources. There follows the directory itself, in two parts, books and journals, of which 148 and 121, respectively, are covered herein. Each publication is subject to a discussion of the rationale for considering

that dates of some issues or volumes might prove problematic, with a code signalling whether the compilers consider the issues to be wholly resolved, a best-case solution, or to be unresolved. Significant space is afforded to the commentaries of previous authorities, which point alone makes this directory of inestimable value in drawing together so much information from disparate sources, even without the countless hours of additional research that have been devoted afresh to this effort. A list of references and an extensive glossary complete the book. Fifty-six main collaborators (of which this reviewer was one) assisted the endeavour, and at least twice as many additional researchers proffered further information.

The CD-ROM contains 66 .pdf files, of which all but two present detailed data concerning volumes, issues, pagination, authorship (for books) and their dating for a range of periodicals and books. The other two files provide (1) a résumé of date changes to 1503 avian taxa (genera, species, and subspecies) that will be implemented in the fourth edition of the Howard & Moore list, and (2) 28 pages of notes to the table in (1).

As stated at the outset, most people with only a passing interest in ornithological taxonomy and nomenclature will not require this book, but some researchers will not only find it invaluable, but almost certainly owe Messrs Dickinson, Overstreet, Dowsett and Bruce a considerable debt of gratitude for their labours.

Guy M Kirwan

## The Urban Birder

David Lindo

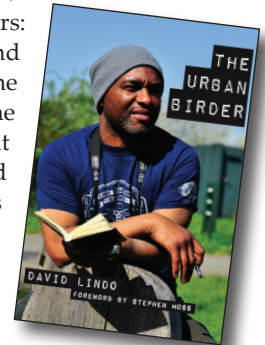
New Holland. 2011.

Hardback. 224 pp, 0 colour photographs.

£9.99.

ISBN 978-1-847739-50-6

Istanbul, Eilat and Dubai: the OSME region is rich in urban locations with fantastic birding opportunities. David Lindo's first book, *The Urban Birder*, charts his own development as a connoisseur of city-based birding, whilst simultaneously exploring his childhood as a black birdwatcher in London in the 1960s and 1970s. David's matter-of-fact, relaxed writing style makes it easy to acquire a flavour of what will be an unfamiliar experience to many readers: dealing with racism and social stereotyping in the pursuit of a hobby. At the same time, his evident passion ensures that David effectively evangelises the merits of exploring your local surroundings, however unlikely a birding location they might appear.



Seven years in Shanghai and Abu Dhabi make it easy for me to empathise with the author's enthusiasm for birding patches of wasteland and oases of green space amid the world's concrete jungles. Most of David's urban birding has been in London and the USA, but it is easy to find parallels with the wealth of similar prospects available to Middle Eastern city-dwellers. I quickly found myself reminiscing about a few memorable discoveries in atypical birding 'hotspots', including a stunning male Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii* at a building site in Abu Dhabi.

You will probably have realised that I count myself an urban birding convert. Will this book inspire the *potential* urban birder to check that patch of waste ground on the way home from the office? Well, the uninitiated among you will just have to read it and find out!

Nick Moran