

# REVIEW

## Birds of Kuwait—A Comprehensive Visual Guide

Edited by Mike Pope & Stamatis Zogaris  
Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration  
Company, Kuwait/Biodiversity East,  
Nicosia. 2012.

Hardback. 413 pages, colour photos  
throughout.

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This is simply the most awesome book I have seen on the birds of a part of the OSME region. Wow! It is a coffee-table book, perhaps slightly less heavy than Mike Jennings's *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* (2010) and certainly lighter than my favourite *HBW* (vol 9). Mike Pope informs me that currently the book is for presentation purposes rather than retail. However an Arabic version, e-book and i-phone app are all planned, the latter two far more portable.

The subtitle is somewhat misleading. While certainly very visual, the book isn't comprehensive and a field guide is still a requirement. The introductory chapters are aimed at the general reader ('An introduction', 'The lives of wild birds in Kuwait', 'Naming birds: Bird taxonomy and identification', 'Observing and photographing birds', 'Bird conservation'). The latter chapter is a good statement of bird conservation problems in Kuwait and should be read by all dignitaries presented with this book. These chapters are innocuous enough but the pedant in me was awakened by the use of 'Arabian Desert' to refer to the deserts of Arabia. The Arabian desert occurs only in Egypt, east of the Nile valley (aka Eastern desert). 'Important places for birds in Kuwait' is of use to birders visiting Kuwait for the first time or for local beginners.

Things become far more interesting in the next section, 'Species Accounts' (pp 50–401). The late Charles Pilcher would be gratified to know that Kuwait's ornithological rarities committee, which he founded in 1994, functions still and has gone from strength to strength. The accounts usually have a main photo and three subsidiary photos per species. Most of the photos were taken in



Kuwait (it is stated which were not) and are excellent. As well as English and scientific names, which follow the OSME list, each account includes Arabic name (in Arabic script) and the IUCN global conservation status code if threatened or near threatened. A brief description concentrates on status in Kuwait. Mike Pope informs me that one of the Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* photos in fact portrays a Sedge Warbler *A. schoenobaenus*, whilst the main Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus* photo is clearly a Black-bellied *P. orientalis*. My favourite photo is AbdulRahman Al-Sirhan's main Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* whilst the Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (with presumably a Green Toad), the long-tongued Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* and the Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* holding an apparent *Bunopus* gecko by its head are intriguing. The cut-off point for species recorded in Kuwait was June 2012. The species accounts are followed by a general-purpose ornithological and conservation-terms glossary, indices of scientific, English and Arabic bird names, a birding code of conduct, list of contributing photographers, references and acknowledgements.

I would have liked to have seen more attention paid to the history of ornithology in Kuwait. In the more recent era, post-1950 and before use of digital photography became universal, Vic Sales, Stan Howe, Paul Haynes, Bill Stuart, Charles Pilcher and George Gregory (see his *The Birds of the State of Kuwait* 2005) all played significant roles. Also, I was surprised to see so many Greek surnames in the book, however before I am accused of being non-PC I should add that Biodiversity East ([www.bio-e.org](http://www.bio-e.org)) of Nicosia have produced a fine book.

Peter Cowan