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Birds Of Southern Africa: Fourth Edition (Princeton Field Guides)



Synopsis

Birds of Southern Africa continues to be the best and most authoritative guide to the bird species of this remarkable region. This fully revised edition covers all birds found in South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and southern Mozambique. The 213 dazzling color plates depict more than 950 species and are accompanied by more than 950 color maps and detailed facing text. This edition includes new identification information on behavior and habitat, updated taxonomy, additional artwork, improved raptor and wader plates with flight images for each species, up-to-date distribution maps reflecting resident and migrant species, and calendar bars indicating occurrence throughout the year and breeding months. Fully updated and revised 213 color plates featuring more than 950 species 950+ color maps and over 380 new improved illustrations. Up-to-date distribution maps show the relative abundance of a species in the region and indicate resident or migrant status. New identification information on behavior and habitat. Taxonomy includes relevant species lumps and splits. Raptor and wader plates with flight images for each species. Calendar bars indicate occurrence throughout the year and breeding months.

Book Information

Series: Princeton Field Guides

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: Princeton University Press; Fourth edition (November 13, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 069115225X

ISBN-13: 978-0691152257

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 53 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #84,735 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #63 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Birds & Birdwatching > Field Guides #84 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Field Guides #401 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Fauna

Customer Reviews

"The relatively small size of the book coupled with the beautiful and accurate plates make this field guide an ideal companion for any level of bird watching in southern Africa."--Nate Fronk, Words about Birds
Throughout this fourth edition there are many additions and updates, including

additional artwork. Each of the authors is a well-known ornithologist and writer, while the two artists are clearly talented and experienced with the birdlife. A great book has been made even better for this fourth edition of *Birds of Southern Africa*."--Charles Leck, *American Reference Books Annual*"Any natural history enthusiast or birder traveling to the region will want this field guide, and many an armchair traveler will appreciate it as well."--Dan R. Kunkle, *Wildlife Activist*"Birders can quickly become overwhelmed at the scope of avifauna in southern Africa, but *Birds of Southern Africa: Fourth Edition* is an easy-to-use and convenient field guide for the region. With multiple colorful illustrations for many species, seasonality bars and useful text details, this field guide is the ideal choice for birders traveling from South Africa to southern Mozambique to Namibia and all bird-rich points in between."--Melissa Mayntz, *About.com Birding/Wild Birds*

Ian Sinclair has traveled widely to view the world's birds and is the author of many books on bird identification. Phil Hockey is director of the University of Cape Town's Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology. Warwick Tarboton is a well-known bird expert, writer, and photographer, and the author of several books. Peter Ryan is associate professor at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, and president of BirdLife South Africa. He has also authored several books.

I bought three South Africa wildlife books at the same time. What I like about *Wildlife of Southern Africa* is its size - it easily fits in a pants pocket and will be great in the field. Secondly, it includes both birds and mammals, plus a variety of other animals. I am sure it is not comprehensive, but may be good enough for a few weeks in South Africa. It includes good color photographs which is not my preference, at least for birds as I find drawings much more informative. What I don't like is its tight binding which makes it spring shut too easily. I find *Birds of Southern Africa* to be a much better bird book, nicely illustrated (my preference over photos), great range maps, and plenty of identification details. It is definitely my choice as a bird reference book, though I may not carry it in the field unless I put it in a backpack. It will be a good reference book for identifying my photos when I have time away from the field. I also purchased *National Audubon Society Field Guide to African Wildlife* for two reasons: 1. I always like the NAS book series and already own almost the complete set, and 2. I know one of the authors. An advantage or a disadvantage depending on your point of view is that it covers all of Africa. If I only visit South Africa, the book contains too many species that I will not see. On the other hand, it is a good reference for the whole continent. I like the flexible binding on the NAS

books, photos are good, but again my preference is for drawings when it comes to birds. The book covers 850 species which I'm sure is far short of being comprehensive. Since I'm always concerned about baggage weight limits when traveling by air, this one of the three is the most likely I'll keep at home.

A slight improvement on the previous edition in terms of maps (which are now colour-coded) and new species (with updated taxonomy). The illustrations are actually produced at a touch larger scale, which is nice, however the pages have begun to look a bit crowded. It may just be a printing error with my personal copy, but the plates seem too garish and over-coloured, as if someone has turned up the saturation a few notches too far. Call me fussy but they also have a somewhat unlikeable scaly, scratched effect. I would question whether the very "Robertsy" inclusion of Afrikaans names (and sonograms in places) is really necessary. (If so why not include all the main languages of the region?). The overall arrangement has been improved (no separate pages for in-flight illustrations, they all appear in one place within their species). There is also a helpful seasonality bar for each bird. So despite the relatively minor flaws I have listed, it is still the best and most useful field guide to the region.

This book has full color plates of nearly every resident and migratory bird found in S.A. Plates are in full color and show juvenile and morph colors so that you can make clean decisions on what that bird "really is." Descriptions show known ranges, migratory occupation areas and timeframes, and even the rare sightings and unusual or unexpected locations where each species has been seen. However, it is the good organization and outstanding color plates showing profile, head feature, upper and lower wing features, and leggings that will keep you paging through this book on your trip. It is the right size to stuff in your day gear or car without getting in the way, so it is easy to keep handy.

Birds of Southern Africa is probably the best available field guide to the birds of southern Africa. However, that does not mean it's without shortcomings. Having more illustrations of each species (as with the Sibley guides) would be valuable. In most cases there were only two illustrations of each species, only rarely including alternate plumage or juvenile birds. There were several times while birding in South Africa that I had difficulty identifying birds in something other than the adult plumage usually illustrated in this book. On the other hand, providing more illustrations would significantly increase this book's size from one that is already too large to

be carried comfortably as a field guide. I also found that sometimes the distribution maps were inaccurate (this may be due to their small size). This was especially true of Lesotho, where I found four species (Green Wood-Hoopoe, White-browed Sparrow Weaver, Pale-winged Starling, and Common Myna) that according to distribution maps in this book should not be found in that country.

In planning a birding trip to the Republic of South Africa, I obviously wanted the best field guide available, and I wanted it in BOOK format so I could personally write in every field mark I deemed valuable. After reading various reviews online, and borrowing the 3rd edition of this guide from friends, I ordered this field guide. I was NOT disappointed!! Considering the artwork, the updated range and migration maps - which were seriously compromised in the previous edition - the size of the guide and its relatively low price, it is clearly the best current book option available. The one very mild criticism of the book would be the somewhat arbitrary selection of sonograms the authors have included. While of marginal value, the space would have been better used for more artwork. Still, I now have been using this guide to study the birds I am most likely to see, and find it immensely useful. The guide has enhanced my anticipation for my upcoming trip later this year and - at the time of this writing - I would enthusiastically recommend the the birds of South Africa 4th edition, by Sinclair, Hockey, Tarbotton & Ryan, to anyone planning to bird in this area of the World over any other field guide.

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