

Obituary

Martin Woodcock (1935–2019)

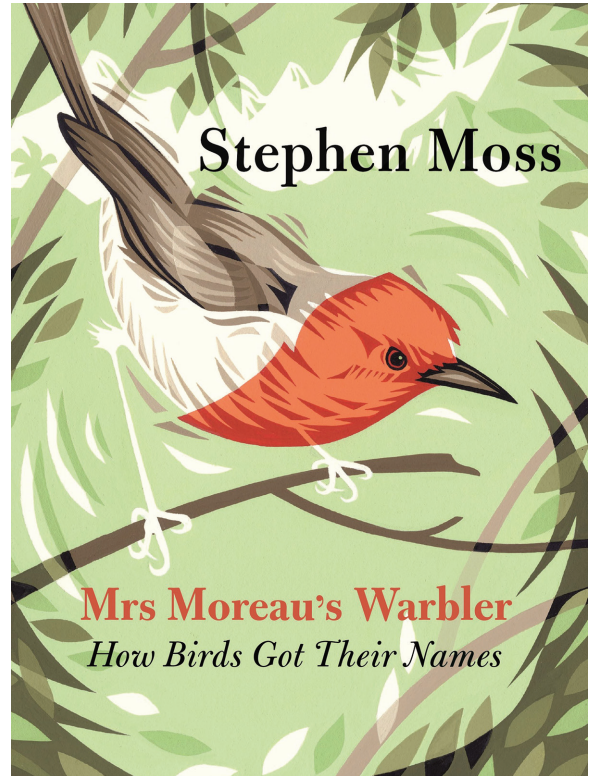
I met Martin in 1965 at a meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club. Earlier that week, on home leave after a three-year stay in Thailand, I had just signed a publishing contract with William Collins for a *Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia*. Martin was working as a stockbroker but he was keen to show me that he could produce the illustrations for this field guide. He invited me to visit his home and see his work and he kindly agreed to work not on a fee basis but for a share of the royalties! Given that Collins had suggested sales would probably not top 3,000 copies this was a most generous agreement on his part. In the end the field guide sold over 50,000 copies and I believe Martin was fairly rewarded. To gain experience of Asian birds Martin came to stay with me in Bangkok and we took him to Chiangmai and Doi Suthep for a serious plunge into Asian birds and he went on to stay with friends in Kuala Lumpur to gain further field experience. Eventually Ben King joined the team and took over the leading role but his conflicts with Collins over massive changes to the text that he had originally submitted delayed the book for several years and publication was not till 1975. Ben later operated Kingbird Tours which were all to Asia and introduced Asian birds to several hundred keen birdwatchers and began to transform Asia into the hugely popular destination for European and American bird-watchers that it is to-day.

Before I met him, Martin at age 26 had been to Uganda to visit his sister and had begun his long love affair with African birds. After leaving London and stockbroking he moved to Staplehurst in Kent with Barbara his second wife and later they moved to Wiveton near Cley on the north Norfolk coast where many other well-known ornithologists have lived and enjoyed the abundant and varied wildlife.

Martin's most important body of bird illustrations is undoubtedly from the seven-volume *Birds of Africa* (1982–2004) initiated by the Academic Press, for which he painted over 200 large plates, each covering an average 20 to 25 species. This involved him in multiple field trips in Africa where, on later trips, he particularly enjoyed Ethiopia. Alongside that he produced numerous single species paintings that demonstrated he was an exceptional artist as well as a very effective and accurate illustrator. But Martin also published a pocket guide to Indian birds in 1980 and, with Michael Gallagher, created the first definitive work on the birds of Oman in 1981. In 2010 Martin self-published his delightful *Safari sketchbook: A bird painter's African odyssey*. Martin was an active member of the British Ornithologists' Club, the African Bird Club, and the Oriental Bird Club. He is survived by his second wife Barbara, and by children, and grandchildren from his first marriage.

— Edward C. Dickinson

Book Review



Mrs Moreau's Warbler: How Birds Got Their Names

by Stephen Moss; May 2018,
Guardian Faber; pp x + 357 (hardbound); Price: Rs 1,199/-.

The renowned British natural history writer and television producer, Stephen Moss, takes readers through, what can most succinctly be described as, a history of humanity's interactions with avifauna. The intriguing title of the book itself deserves note, but we'll come to that a little later. Right from the days of onomatopoeic names, names based on colour and other prominent physical features, to the colonial-era race for eponymous names, to the current debates on fairer, more modern and international naming conventions, Moss leads readers through a great sweep of time and straddles the history of science, natural history, and even linguistics. While this is the broad scope of the book, there are absorbing asides that will interest not only the ornithologist or the seasoned birder, but also the uninitiated.

For instance, Moss narrates how James Bond, the world famous spy, had ornithological origins. Ian Fleming, whilst working to meet a fast-approaching deadline for *Casino Royale*, noticed the name of the author of the *Birds of West Indies* on his shelf, and was taken in by it. The author was renowned American ornithologist, James Bond! Though probably well known to many birders in India, Moss tells us about Alan Octavian Hume, the British civil servant who played a key role in the formation of the Indian National Congress, and was an accomplished ornithologist