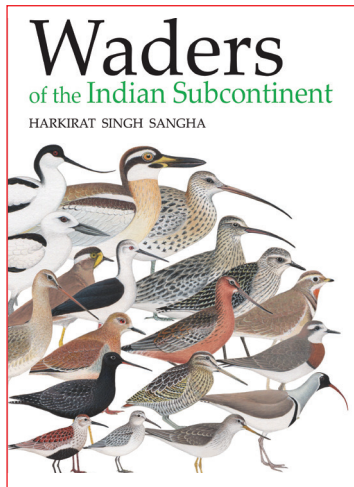


Book review



Waders of the Indian Subcontinent

Harkirat Singh Sangha.
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by the author; with
support from WWF-India.

Pp. i–xvi, 1–520.

How does one even put down such an interesting book, so full of wonderful facts about waders, and get round to writing a review? Very tough! Sangha has achieved the near impossible with his new 'fact book'.

For most people, identifying waders (or shorebirds as they are often called) can be difficult, especially when many migratory species are largely dressed in drab shades of brown and may only be seen from a distance when they are on intertidal flats during the northern winter. That said, their flocking habit, often in the tens of thousands and in mixed flocks, running helter-skelter as they search choice crabs or worms, or when they perform amazing, coordinated flights, make them an attractive group to study. This book is packed chockful of information about these amazing birds. It provides detailed accounts for each species, with precise information on how to recognise differences between these species, separate birds from their bright breeding plumage and duller non-breeding plumages, and much more. There is detailed information to differentiate adults from juveniles, using clues in plumage, bill, leg, and eye colour, as well as details to separate males from females for those species where this is possible in the field. The section on similar looking species (under Confusion Species) is handy.

The book covers all 83 species of waders recorded in the Indian Subcontinent (covering Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Chagos Archipelago). A lot of detailed information on distribution, movement patterns, food and feeding habits, moult, vocalisation, measurements, and conservation status add a wealth of knowledge about each species. For all species breeding in the region, there is a comprehensive description of the breeding habits, including variation in seasonal nesting period in different regions of the Subcontinent, type of nests, colour and shapes of eggs, period of incubation, and fledging time of young. A map provides up to date information on the seasonal occurrence of each species in the South Asian region and is handy to get a quick understanding of their overall distribution.

Sangha has done well to even include the newly described and vagrant White-faced Plover *Charadrius dealbatus*, based on a single record from the Andaman Islands, given that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands lie close to South-east Asia. With more bird watching and photographers travelling to these islands, perhaps more information on this species and other species will be forthcoming in future.

The book is richly illustrated with over 450 colour photographs, depicting for each species, breeding and non-breeding plumages, and sexual and age differences. This demonstrates how Sangha has gone to great lengths to ensure that each species is depicted in the most useful manner to assist in its identification. The photos are largely of excellent quality and have been contributed by a range of photographers from within and outside the region, a remarkable collaborative effort in itself, and one that adds great value to the book.

An added bonus is that the book includes 22 pages of colour plates where all the species have been illustrated. The illustrations of different plumages, ages, and sexes where they are differentiated are helpful to compare and contrast features of the species. That said, the quality of the illustrations in my review copy is not very sharp and bright as can be expected from such a guide. It may have more to do with the quality of printing than the original artwork. While the level of detail on most illustrations is adequate and the pointers highlight key features, the plates covering pratincoles is rather disappointing.

For those interested in taxonomy, the book goes further in providing useful information on subspecies, with details on those recorded in the region and help to identify differences. As an example, the nominate subspecies of the Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus* occurs as a breeder in the Indian Subcontinent and is augmented by migrants that breed further north in Central Asia. In addition, a southern subspecies *seebohmi* extends from Sri Lanka northwards into the Subcontinent, the precise distribution of which is not well documented. As knowledge on subspecies is largely in its infancy in the region, this book should encourage the readers in learning to identify subspecies and contribute their findings to generate a more complete understanding of their distributions. Such information is valuable in planning and implementing conservation action for these subspecies and species, particularly those that have limited ranges and face specific threats not (currently) faced by other subspecies.

The introductory section is comprehensive, and a must read. Information on identification, tracing history of study and hunting of waders from the British era to the current age of digital photography are all most fascinating. The section on wader migration, flyways, wader habitats, and threats are very well researched and presented in a reader-friendly manner. With this background the reader can take a well-informed dive into the various species chapters. The book draws on observations from a number of people across the region, including the over two decades of the author's personal observations that bring a lot of interesting facts to light about the species.

Sangha has done a great job in gleaning information from a wide range of sources including books, journals, newspaper articles, and websites. Curiously missing is the recent tracking research of the migration of the Oriental Pratincole from Australia, which were found to breed in Karnataka, in India, for a species that was known to be a local migrant in the region! Further tracking

has revealed that they migrate southwards through to Sri Lanka, and directly across the Bay of Bengal to Indonesia and onwards to Australia. The migratory movements revealed by this species have challenged our traditional definition of flyways. That said, this research work was initiated in 2019 and may have come to light after the book was finalised. Given the increase of research of migratory shorebirds in the flyways, there will no doubt be a lot more information in the coming decade to plug into a future edition of the book!

Invariably, a book that covers so much ground has a few errors. Endearingly the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species “Near Threatened” category is referred to as “Nearly Threatened” through the book.

Weighing in at 1,600 gm, I am sure that I will keep this ‘fact book’ safe at home so I can come back and read at leisure to learn more about these amazing species.

All said and done, this book is a must buy for anyone interested in birds and quite a steal at INR 3,500. Perhaps well worth getting a copy before it sells out.

– Taej Mundkur

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Letter to the Editor

Retraction of record of Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aenea* from Jammu & Kashmir

We were pleased to publish a record of Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aenea* from Jammu & Kashmir (UT), India through a note in *Indian BIRDS* (Sharma & Sohil 2017). However, I request you to retract the said record as I believe that this could be an incorrect identification of an Ashy Drongo *D. leucophaeus* as a Bronzed Drongo. My comment comes after a careful perusal of the photograph where I could see the red iris and comparatively longer tail of the former. The glossy plumage of the bird in the original image could be due to some light effects. My attention was drawn towards this misidentification after receiving comments on the image uploaded in www.ebird.org/india as a Bronzed Drongo. My colleague, Muzaffar A. Kichloo, who is also the eBird editor for the state, and I re-investigated this by checking other high-quality images where we could see the key characteristics of a Bronzed Drongo—unfortunately absent in our record photo. Muzaffar A. Kichloo also consulted Maxim Rodrigues, Vyom Vyas, and Ashwin Viswanathan regarding the ID and all of them verified the bird as an Ashy Drongo. Therefore, this record may be retracted.

Reference

Sharma, N., & Sohil, A., 2017. Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aenea* and Hair-crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus* from Jammu & Kashmir, India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 168.

– Asha Sohil

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