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Book Review

Atlas of Birds of Iran. Mohammad Kaboli, Mansour Aliabadian, Mohammad Tohidifar, Alireza Hashemi, Seyed Babak Musavi and Cees C. Roselaar. Iran Department of the Environment, Tehran. 617 pp.

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General

The text of the book is written bilingually in Persian and English and is printed on thick glossy paper, sized at 25x34 cm. The book is heavy, weighing about 1.5 kg and cannot be held in one hand for long. In the table of contents, each family is indicated with a logo of one species of that family (similar to Mansoori's Field Guide, 2001). The text starts with 28 pages of introductory general information about birds including a summary of ornithological studies in Iran, Iranian bird checklists, how to use the book, avian morphology and anatomy, avian breeding and migration, how to identify birds, and the major habitats of Iran and conservation categories. This book project was funded by the Iran Department of the Environment. The front cover is illustrated with a picture of a Sind Woodpecker and the back cover with a Hume's Wheatear.

Systematics

In accordance with Scott et al. (1975) and Scott and Adhami (2006), the taxonomy of orders and families follows the older taxonomic listing of Morony et al. (1975), but the taxonomy at the species level follows Sibley and Monroe (1990; 1993). The systematic list covers 534 species, 227 genera, and 78 families belonging to 22 orders. The sequence of *Dendrocopos* woodpeckers seems strange. *Dendrocopos major*, *syriacus*, *leucopterus* and *assimilis* are very closely related and should come together while *D. medius* and *D. minor* should come before or after, but not in the middle, of these four related species. These latter two species are currently treated within other genera: *Dendrocoptes medius* and *Dryobates minor*.

Following Roselaar and Aliabadian (2009) and Khaleghizadeh et al. (2011), species in this book not listed by Scott and Adhami (2006) are the Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* (page 54), Light-bellied Brent Goose *Branta hrota* (page 92), Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* (page 93), Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* (page 141), Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius* (page 145), Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* (page 203), Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* (page 219), Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* (page 287), Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* (page 389), Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* (page 434), Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* (page 462), and Ultramarine Flycatcher

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Ficedula superciliaris (page 494); while the Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius lahtora* (page 397) and Kurdish Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthoprymna* (page 428) are treated as full species.

In a few cases, the taxonomic treatment at the species level is not in accordance with concurrent world checklists (Gill and Donsker, 2016). One example is with the treatment of the Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* complex. The current Atlas recognizes two species in Iran: the Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* and the Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius lahtora* (page 397), with two subspecies of the latter occurring in Iran, *L. lahtora pallidirostris* and *L. lahtora aucheri*. During the publication of the Atlas, the Great Grey Shrikes occurring in Iran were split into three species: Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* and Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius pallidirostris* (IOC list 2012–2016, Gill and Donsker, 2016). Other birds that are treated as full species in the Atlas but not in the IOC list (Gill and Donsker, 2016) include Bewick's Swan *Cygnus bewickii* (page 87), Light-bellied Brent Goose *Branta hrota* (page 92), Heuglin's (or Siberian) Gull *Larus heuglini* (page 264) and Turkestan (or Bokhara) Tit *Parus bokharensis* (page 502).

Forms which remain merged as a single species in the Atlas but are now split in the recent IOC list (Gill and Donsker, 2016) include Western and Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (page 70) and *Bubulcus coromandus*, Siberian and European Stonechats within the Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* complex (page 419), Black-throated and Red-throated Thrushes *Turdus atrogularis* and *Turdus ruficollis* (page 439), and the three forms of the Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* (page 497).

The Atlas gives full treatment to four species of doubtful occurrence in Iran, namely Falcated Duck *Anas falcata* (page 99), Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus* (page 327), Güldenstädt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster* (page 417) and Yellow-breasted Tit (Azure Tit) *Cyanistes flavipectus* (page 504).

While the authors give the scientific names of the various subspecies of many species in the Atlas, even when the differences between subspecies are small, surprisingly they do not mention the various subspecies of the White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* which occurs in Iran, although there are striking differences between some of these subspecies (page 375).

Species accounts

This is the first Iranian bird book giving original photos of all Iranian bird species. In addition to the scientific name, English name and Persian name, local language names are given when available in Azeri, Kurdish, Gilaki, Sistani and Luri.

Birds of each order are separable with different colors at the edge of the pages. One column of text is given in English and one in Persian.

In addition to the morphological characteristics of each species, information is given on biological characteristics, distribution and abundance, and conservation status. The text on characteristics of each species was primarily extracted from the Birds of the Western Palearctic (Cramp, Simmons and Perrins, 1977–1994). It is disappointing that the authors devote so much space to morphological characteristics and biological characteristics (information which is widely available in the published literature) and yet only a few lines to distribution and abundance which are so important in a work that calls itself an "Atlas". Information on the distribution and abundance of each species was based on various sources of data, primarily Scott et al. (1975), original data gathered by Derek Scott and Cees S. Roselaar, and the authors' own field information.

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Twenty types of habitat are also shown with pre-defined logos. The category of each species in the IUCN Red List of threatened species (CR, EN, VU, NT, LC, DD), the appendices of CITES (I, II, III) and Iran Environmental Laws (endangered, protected species, unprotected) are also shown with pre-defined logos.

Photos

For each species two original photos are provided, except in the case of several rare species. Most of the original photos are of good to excellent quality. An attempt was made to find photos of birds taken in Iran, however, photos from abroad were included when no good quality photos could be found from Iran. In a few instances, only photographs of immature birds are included, when photographs of adult birds would have been more useful e.g. Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* (page 159) and Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* (page 256). A few photographs appear to be problematic, including: the two photos purportedly of the Lesser White-fronted Geese *Anser erythropus* (page 90) do not show any of the key features of this species, namely the small bill, conspicuous yellow eye-ring, and rather short, thick and dark neck, and would appear to be of a Greater White-fronted X Lesser White-fronted Goose hybrid; the bottom photo of the Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* (page 278) is strange in that the bird appears to have a black bill and unusually dark under parts and it would seem to be an individual of the black-billed eastern race *longipennis* which is very unlikely to occur in Iran; the top left photo of the Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (page 376) is almost certainly a first-winter Yellow Wagtail (with its dark lores); and the photo at the bottom of page 493 is puzzling in that it appears to be a Taiga Flycatcher or Red-throated Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla* (Pallas), a recently split species that has not as yet been recorded in Iran. The bird is a male in spring plumage and could not therefore have been photographed in Touran in north-eastern Iran in October, as listed in the credits.

Maps

Each species is depicted with a distribution map. But, it is disappointing that the maps are so small and have a relatively dark background, which sometimes makes it difficult to find the grid dots. The maps indicate the status of each species with six different colors (purple= resident, pink= non-breeding summer visitor, red= breeding summer visitor, blue= winter visitor, green= passage migrant, yellow= vagrant). This is a great advance in knowledge of Iranian birds, because previous bird books have presented maps in only three colors (purple= resident, red= summer visitor, blue= wintering visitor) and lines = rare passage migrants and vagrants (Scott et al., 1975; Mansoori, 2001).

Most of the distribution ranges are based on Derek Scott's data sheets and distribution maps (which utilized 25-km grid squares to plot distributions on the basis of records from the late 1960s and 1970s). Distribution maps are given for all species, even extreme rarities that have been recorded on only one or two occasions. However, the distribution maps of rare birds were updated with records presented in three published papers on Iranian rarities (Scott, 2008; Roselaar and Aliabadian, 2009; Khaleghizadeh et al., 2011). One example of a great change in the distribution of a species in Iran in recent decades is that of the Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. While previous maps (Scott et al., 1975; Mansoori, 2001) depicted the range of this species as being confined to southwest Iran, the revised map shows the range including northern, central, western and southern Iran (page 313). The distribution maps also include some recent records of the author's themselves.

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Appendices

There is a long list of cited references but the authors have not mentioned any reference to Jamshid Mansoori's field guide to the birds of Iran. There is also a mistake in the citation of Harrison, C. and Castell, P. 2002, with Harrison's first name, Colin, being given as his surname. In addition to the list of references, there is an appendix giving the photographers' names and locality for each photograph listed by sequence of species, and indices of English and scientific names.

Acknowledgements

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