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## Books

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# Books

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## **A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT, INCLUDING PAKISTAN, NEPAL, BHUTAN, BANGLADESH, SRI LANKA & THE MALDIVES.**

-By Bikram Grewall, Bill Harvey and Otto Pfister. 2002. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. and Oxford, U.K. 512 pp. \$29.95.

This photographic guide is an expanded version of Bikram Grewal's book of 1995 for India and Nepal which covered 252 species. The 512 pages of this pocket-sized book provide photographs, descriptions and range maps for 668 species—more than half the birds of the Indian subcontinent and neighboring islands. Many bird species are illustrated with two or three photographs, some of which show sex differences and birds in flight.

Any visitor to India should carry this book, as it offers a real and immediate guide to identification of rare and common birds which the traveler will encounter in India's cities, hills, plains, wetlands and jungles. The introductory 43 pages constitute a fine essay on how to use the book, including a history of some of India's chief ornithologists and what many bird books lack, abundance codes for birds, as well as an indication of their globally threatened status. I was especially interested in the three pages dealing with threats to birds in India, having grown up collecting birds in that country for my father, A. E. Jones, whose considerable collection of 3,000 birds is now housed in the Bombay Natural History Museum. These real threats include loss of habitat by deforestation, landslides, burning, pesticides, filling in of wetlands, hunting, trapping, pollution and the introduction of exotic plants. My own visits to India during the past 20 years have confirmed how real these threats are and what impacts they are having on birds, especially in agricultural areas.

Each species is afforded a half page for the photographs, description, voice and habits plus a distribution map showing winter and breeding ranges. Generally the photographs are of a very high standard, but as with all photographic guides,

they cannot and do not show subtle differences in plumage between species and between sexes. "Most photographs are of adult males and the sex is not indicated" is a quote from an explanation, on page 39, of the illustrations. This statement reflects the difficulty of illustrating species and sex differences with photographs.

Missing species include the Grey-headed Flycatcher and the Paradise Flycatcher, both relatively abundant and outstanding birds of their group. There is a poor picture of a male Black-throated Thrush on page 278, and I believe that there is a mistake in the pictures of the Saker Falcon and its sub-species, both shown on page 215. I was involved intimately with the latter species, which has a barred breast, rather than the horizontal moon-shaped markings typical of the Peregrine. The adult pictured is far too blue for a Saker, which even the description says is brown.

Despite these few drawbacks, I thoroughly recommend this photographic guide, especially for the beginner and the casual visitor to the Indian region. The guide would be of lesser use to bird-banders, who would find Salim Ali's *A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* or the newer *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* by Kazmierczak and Van Perlo more useful. Nevertheless, I commend the authors for their fine work in this new book, one of many which have been published in recent years on birds of the Indian subcontinent.

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