

BOOK REVIEW

THE COLLINS FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Ben King, Martin Woodcock, and E.C. Dickinson, 1988 The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington, Mass. Illus. 480pp. Softcover, \$19.95

For anyone planning a trip to Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Hainan and/or Hong Kong with a desire to identify the exotic birdlife of the region, the present text is undoubtedly the most valuable field guide available. King and Dickinson first published their guide in England in 1975 and it has now been released for publication in the U.S. Their text, together with the clear paintings of Martin Woodcock open up this huge avifauna to the American birder.

What I find most impressive is that the authors have covered so many species without sacrificing the concept of the field guide. Nearly twelve hundred species of birds are recognized as occupying this corner of the world, a number almost twice as great as those covered in the second edition of the recently reviewed National Geographic Guide to North American Birds. Yet the number of pages in the two guides is comparable and the size of the South-East Asia guide is significantly smaller. What you don't get, of course, is the illustration of all the sorts of intraspecific variability due to age, sex and geography. As much of this information on southeast Asian birds is not known to anywhere near the extent that it is for North American species, this cannot be considered a serious shortcoming of the field guide.

The artwork in this field guide is uncommonly good, on a par with the art in the Peterson Guides which served as its inspiration. Like the Peterson Guides, the plates make use of little lines pointing to the most distinctive field marks. This is a technique that has not outlived its utility. While all 1190 species have not been figured, approximately three quarters have. Those that have been omitted from the plates will either be known to many North American birders (such as the Red-necked Grebe, and Wilson's Storm-Petrel), are similar enough to species that are in the plates so that the written descriptions are sufficient to make the distinctions (Brown-winged Kingfisher, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide), or are represented by small line drawings in the text (many of the water-birds and raptors).

Assuming that most potential buyers of this field guide will not have a great deal of experience with southeast Asian birds, you are encouraged to read the introduction and the how to identify birds section in the front of the text. The tips that are included here, will be useful in learning how to identify birds, not only in southeast Asia, but almost anywhere else in the world, including your back yard.

Even if you are not planning a trip to the Orient in the near future, I recommend having this book as a reference source to identify those escaped cage birds that do show up around the country now and again. Or if nothing else, it will provide the basis for some great birding dreams. (HTH)