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INTRODUCTION

The Horn of Africa comprises the countries of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia, together with the Socotra archipelago which is politically part of Yemen. It is a region of high endemism with more than 70 species only (or virtually only) found in this corner of the continent, and also a major migration route for Palearctic species wintering in Africa. The composition of the resident avifauna combines elements of several biomes, including the Sudan-Guinea savanna biome, the Sahel biome, the Sahara-Sindian biome, the Afrotropical Highlands biome, the Somali-Masai biome and the East African Coast biome (Fishpool & Evans 2001). Although parts of the region are currently off-limits to birders (notably most of Somalia), most of the endemics and near-endemics can be seen in Ethiopia, which has remained the most accessible country within the Horn of Africa. Recently, birders have begun to visit Somaliland and Djibouti, and records from these trips have already expanded our knowledge of the region. Covering every species ever recorded in the five territories included in the book, the primary aim of this guide is to enable identification to species level of any bird that may be seen in the region, and in many cases to subspecies level if desired.

This book was conceived as a companion to the *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa* (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002), and was initiated even before the latter was published. Covering the region lying immediately to the north of East Africa, it is inevitable that there is a considerable overlap in species. Rather than duplicate effort, we have therefore re-used a considerable number of illustrations from the East Africa guide, frequently rearranging them into new plates. Many other images have been digitally manipulated to convert them into the correct subspecies for the Horn of Africa. Nevertheless, a large number of new artworks were prepared for this guide, covering species and subspecies not found in East Africa and, in addition, several groups or plates (e.g. cuckooshrikes, tits, cisticolas and flycatchers) have been re-painted in entirety. For this revised edition, the six estrildid plates have been repainted, and corrections have been made to a few other images. The plate of large white-headed gulls has also been replaced.

Similarly, the species accounts for overlapping species have been adapted or expanded as necessary (sometimes extensively) to include appropriate information on races and distribution in the Horn of Africa. Despite the strong overlap in the avifauna of the two regions, almost 20% of the species in the Horn of Africa do not occur in East Africa, and new accounts were written for these species. For this revised edition, the text has been updated as necessary and a large number of maps have been revised, notably in the light of new information resulting from some recent trips to Somaliland (northern Somalia). There are several additional species in this edition, comprising both newly recorded rarities and taxonomic splits. The result is a complete and comprehensive field guide to the birds of this relatively little-known part of Africa. It is worth noting that more than a thousand species have been recorded from the region, which is almost half of the total number of species to be found in sub-Saharan Africa, and a hundred more than in the entire subregion of southern Africa.

Knowledge of bird identification and distribution is constantly evolving, and guides such as this can quickly become out of date. We intend to update the information in future editions of the book, and welcome any comments, corrections or new information to assist us in keeping this field guide as up to date as possible. Please send any contributions to the authors, care of the publishers.