

Book reviews

The avifauna of Hong Kong. Carey, G. J., Chalmers, M. L., Diskin, D. A., Kennerley, P. R., Leader, P. J., Leven, M. R., Lewthwaite, R. W., Melville, D. S., Turnbull, M. and Young, L. (2001). Hong Kong Bird Watching Society. 564 pp. Price £44.50. ISBN 962-7508-02-0. DOI: 10.1017/S0959270903213071

For such a small area (1,100 square km), an impressive number of bird species has been recorded in Hong Kong – some 450. Records go back to 1860 when Swinhoe was probably the first western ornithologist to visit what was then a British colony. Since the 1930s there has been an almost unbroken tradition of bird recording in Hong Kong, fuelled by interested expatriates and, especially more recently, Hong Kong Chinese birdwatchers. Not surprisingly, therefore, vast amounts of occurrence and distribution data have been collected, and the avifauna of Hong Kong is perhaps one of the best known in mainland Asia.

It is appropriate therefore that Hong Kong now has a book detailing the distribution patterns and trends of all bird species occurring there. There are background chapters covering ornithological history, physical characteristics and climate, and 31 colour plates depicting a variety of habitats and bird species. There follows a full list of all bird species recorded in Hong Kong, and the results of the first coordinated Hong Kong breeding bird survey (1993–1996). This includes maps of distribution at the 1-km square level, and for an area more famous for its migrants, it is nice to see resident species receive such attention. There are reports on the winter waterbird counts (carried out since 1979), bird ringing in Hong Kong, and the trade in wild birds with its consequences for categorization of species occurring there.

The bulk of the book covers the individual species accounts, and the authors are to be congratulated on producing a fine work with great attention to detail, through a long and arduous process of reviewing records collected since 1958. For migrants, the timing of occurrences is given in a histogram, and for the commoner waterbird species, graphs of peak annual counts since 1958 are included. Otherwise the species accounts give range (in China and Asia) and taxonomy, and then a detailed section on the Hong Kong status and distribution of each species. For species with fewer than ten records, these are listed individually. A gazetteer and bibliography complete the book.

This hefty tome is not the first attempt to publish a summary of bird occurrences in Hong Kong, but it is certainly the best. It is an invaluable reference for the status of Hong Kong's birds, and being the only such detailed work available in the region, for China and Asia as a whole.

The New York City Audubon Society Guide to finding birds in the Metropolitan area. Fowle, M.T. and Kerlinger, P. (2001). Cornell University Press, Ithaca. 230pp. £11.50 paperback. DOI: 10.1017/S0959270903223078

Although perhaps not often considered a birding locality, over 350 species have been recorded in the New York metropolitan area. This bird-finding guide has been compiled by a number of local naturalists, and covers 31 sites, most of which are in easy reach of downtown New York. A further nine public nature reserves within 2 to 2½ hours drive of Manhattan are covered in a separate chapter. Details are also given of pelagic birding opportunities, and “hawkwatch” localities near the city. Appendices cover birding resources (including bird societies, rare bird ‘phone lines and web sites), a list of site management authorities, and a checklist of the birds of the area (giving status and abundance).

This neatly packaged book is a mine of information, with detailed information for each site, including good quality maps, and, together with a field guide, would be all that is needed for anyone visiting New York with some time on their hands to go birding.

Also received:

The Purple Martin. Doughty, R. R. (2002). Corrie Herring Hooks Series. University of Texas Press. Price £15.50. ISBN 029271615X.

A natural history of Purple Martin of North America, highlighting their long association with humans.

Birds of the Texas Hill Country. Lockwood, M. W. (2001). Corrie Herring Hooks Series. University of Texas Press. 560pp. Price £30.50. ISBN 029273459X.

A complete guide to the status and distribution of birds in the Texas Hill Country, USA. Includes introductory sections on topography, river systems, climate, vegetation and conservation, as well as a brief guide to parks and conservation areas.

Seb Buckton