Guide to LIVING BIRDS

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Preface

This Guide to the Living Birds is one of a series covering between them the entire animal kingdom. Each guide uses an annotated classification to give a basic understanding of the animals under consideration, including their relationship with other animals and the inter-relations within the group. Thus this book first views birds as highly specialised tetrapod vertebrates and then presents a pattern of their diversity.

Although the concept developed in all these guides is the same, they differ to some extent in their approach. In most groups of animals classification is based on structural features alone. But in birds their basic structure is so uniform (except for details often difficult to see) that ecological and behavioural differences must also be used. Birds have an immense popular appeal due largely to the ease with which they can be seen in the field. They are relatively large, colourful, diurnal animals that do things. They migrate, establish territory, court and breed and most have recognisable voices. Moreover television cameras are now bringing many of them to our attention from remote parts so that the worldwide coverage of this guide is useful. We have been concerned, therefore, to present a reasoned, if slightly unorthodox, classification that should not offend the scientist, but will appeal to the amateur ornithologist.

Birds, like mammals, being comparative newcomers in evolutionary terms, have very interesting patterns of distribution, sometimes only explained by the movements of the continents in the past. (Continental drift has been dealt with at some length in the companion volume on the reptiles.) A major feature of the guide, therefore, is the inclusion of maps showing the areas occupied by almost all the bird families that are not worldwide. Such maps are, of course, only approximate since birds

continually change their range through migration, human introduction and re-introduction and Man's destruction of habitat.

There are so many excellent major works on birds that to present any sort of literature list would be virtually impossible in a small book. But a New Dictionary of Birds edited by A. Landsborough Thomson, Nelson, Edinburgh & London, 1964 has provided the basis for the classification used. The popular (English) names used and the division of families into genera and species have been largely taken from A Checklist of the Birds of the World, E.S. Gruson, Collins, London, 1976. For a more detailed account of the structural and biological features of each family of birds Fundamentals of Ornithology, J. Van Tyne & A.J. Berger, Dover, New York, 1959 is suggested, though this work follows a slightly different classification, especially in the arrangement of the song birds.

It is worth mentioning that this book is in no sense a 'Field Guide' of which there are many for the identification of birds from particular areas such as Britain, Europe, West Africa, North America. The Guide to the Living Birds is an organised summary for the student which, in addition, will give the answers to such questions as - how many kinds of kingfisher are there? - in what parts of the world are they found? - what are their nearest relatives? - do all have mainly blue plumage?

We are again grateful to Mrs. Margaret Clarke for the meticulous preparation of the typescript for photolithography and we are greatly indebted to Mr. Phil Brooks who made the drawings of the birds which are an integral part of the book.

JEW

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London, August 1978

Contents

	Page
1 INTRODUCTION	1
The uniformity of bird architecture	2
Problems of bird systematics	2
The current phylogenetic classification of birds .	3
The systematic treatment used in this guide	6
Geographical distribution	9
Scientific names	12
Use of the guide	13
2 THE BIRDS	14
Class Aves	18
P A R T I G R O U N D B I R D S	32
3 RATITES AND TINAMOUS	34
Superorder Ratitae	36
Order Struthioniformes	41
Family Struthionidae	41
Order Rheiformes	42
Family Rheidae	42
Order Casuariiformes	43
Family Casuariidae	44
Family Dromaiidae	45
Order Apterygiformes	46
Family Apterygidae	46
Superorder Tinamae	47
Order Tinamiformes	47
Family Tinamidae	47
4 GAME BIRDS, CRANES & ALLIES	49
Superorder Carinatae	51
Order Galliformes	52
Suborder Galli	52
Family Megapodidae	54
Family Cracidae	55

C O N T E N T S

	Page
Family Tetraonidae	56
Family Phasianidae	57
Family Numididae	58
Family Meleagrididae	59
Suborder Opisthocomi	60
Family Opisthocomidae	60
Order Gruiformes	61
Suborder Mesoenatides	63
Family Mesoenatidae	63
Suborder Turnices	64
Family Turnicidae	64
Family Pedionomidae	64
Suborder Grues	66
Family Gruidae	66
Family Aramidae	68
Family Psophiidae	69
Family Rallidae	70
Suborder Heliornithes	71
Family Heliornithidae	71
Suborder Rhynocheti	72
Family Rhynochetidae	72
Suborder Eurypygae	73
Family Eurypygidae	73
Suborder Cariamae	74
Family Cariamidae	74
Suborder Otides	75
Family Otididae	75
P A R T II A Q U A T I C B I R D S	76
5 SHORE BIRDS	78
Order Charadriiformes	80
Suborder Charadrii	81
Family Jacanidae	82
Family Rostratulidae	83
Family Haematopodidae	84
Family Charadriidae	85
Family Scolopacidae	86
Family Recurvirostridae	87

C O N T E N T S

	Page
Family Phalaropidae	88
Family Dromadidae	89
Family Burhinidae	90
Family Glareolidae	91
Family Thinocoridae	92
Family Chionididae	92
Suborder Lari	93
Family Stercorariidae	94
Family Laridae	94
Family Rhynchopidae	97
Suborder Alcae	99
Family Alcidae	99
6 FRESHWATER BIRDS	100
Order Gaviiformes	102
Family Gaviidae	102
Order Podicipediformes	104
Family Podicipedidae	104
Order Ciconiiformes	105
Suborder Ardeae	106
Family Ardeidae	106
Suborder Balaenicipites	107
Family Balaenicipitidae	107
Suborder Ciconiae	108
Family Ciconiidae	109
Family Scopidae	110
Family Threskiornithidae	111
Suborder Phoenicopteriformes	113
Family Phoenicopteridae	113
Order Anseriformes	114
Suborder Anhimae	115
Family Anhimidae	115
Suborder Anseres	116
Family Anatidae	116
7 MARINE BIRDS	117
Order Procellariiformes	119
Family Diomedidae	120
Family Procellariidae	121
Family Hydrobatidae	123

CONTENTS

	Page
Family Pelecanoididae	124
Order Pelecaniformes	125
Suborder Phaethontes	126
Family Phaethontidae	126
Suborder Pelecani	127
Family Pelecanidae	127
Family Sulidae	129
Family Phalacrocoracidae	130
Family Anhingidae	131
Suborder Fregatae	132
Family Fregatidae	132
Order Sphenisciformes	133
Family Spheniscidae	133
 PART III PERCHING BIRDS	135
8 BIRDS OF PREY	136
Order Falconiformes	139
Suborder Cathartae	140
Family Cathartidae	140
Suborder Falcones	141
Family Accipitridae	141
Family Falconidae	143
Suborder Sagittarii	144
Family Sagittariidae	144
Order Strigiformes	146
Family Tytonidae	146
Family Strigidae	147
9 ARBOREAL BIRDS	
PIGEONS, PARROTS, CUCKOOS & COLIES	148
Order Columbiformes	151
Suborder Pterocletes	152
Family Pteroclididae	152
Suborder Columbae	153
Family Columbidae	153
Order Psittaciformes	154
Family Psittacidae	154
Order Cuculiformes	156
Suborder Cuculi	157

C O N T E N T S

	Page
Family Cuculidae	157
Subfamily Cuculinae	156
Subfamily Phaenicophaeinae	156
Subfamily Crotophaginae	156
Subfamily Neomorphinae	156
Subfamily Couinae	156
Subfamily Centropodinae	156
Suborder Musophagi	158
Family Musophagidae	158
Order Coliiformes	159
Family Coliidae	159
 10 ARBOREAL BIRDS	
ROLLERS, TROGONS, WOODPECKERS & ALLIES	160
Order Coraciiformes	162
Suborder Alcedines	163
Family Alcedinidae	164
Family Todidae	165
Family Momotidae	166
Suborder Meropes	167
Family Meropidae	167
Suborder Coracii	168
Family Coraciidae	169
Family Leptosomatidae	170
Family Upupidae	171
Family Phoeniculidae	172
Suborder Bucerotes	173
Family Bucerotidae	173
Order Trogoniformes	174
Family Trogonidae	174
Order Piciformes	176
Suborder Galbulae	177
Family Galbulidae	178
Family Bucconidae	178
Family Capitonidae	180
Family Indicatoridae	182
Family Ramphastidae	183
Suborder Pici	184
Family Picidae	184

C O N T E N T S

	Page
11 AERIAL FEEDERS	186
Order Apodiformes	188
Suborder Apodi	189
Family Apodidae	189
Family Hemiprocnidae	190
Suborder Trochili	191
Family Trochilidae	191
Order Caprimulgiformes	193
Suborder Steatornithes	194
Family Steatornithidae	194
Suborder Caprimulga	195
Family Podargidae	195
Family Nyctibiidae	196
Family Aegothelidae	197
Family Caprimulgidae	198
12 PRIMITIVE PASSERINES	199
Order Passeriformes	200
Suborder Eurylaimi	201
Family Eurylaimidae	201
Suborder Tyranni	202
Superfamily Furnarioidea	203
Family Dendrocolaptidae	203
Family Furnariidae	203
Family Formicariidae	203
Family Conopophagidae	204
Family Rhinocryptidae	204
Superfamily Tyrannoidea	205
Family Pittidae	205
Family Philepittidae	205
Family Xenicidae	207
Family Tyrannidae	207
Family Pipridae	207
Family Cotingidae	208
Family Phytotomidae	208
Suborder Menurae	209
Family Menuridae	209
Family Atrichornithidae	210

C O N T E N T S

	Page
13 THE SONG BIRDS	211
Suborder Oscines	214
Section I The non-arboreal song birds	215
Family Alaudidae	216
Family Hirundinidae	216
Family Motacillidae	217
Family Campephagidae	218
Family Pycnonotidae	219
Family Irenidae	220
Family Laniidae	221
Family Vangidae	222
Family Bombycillidae	223
Family Dulidae	224
Family Cinclidae	224
Family Troglodytidae	225
Family Mimidae	226
Family Prunellidae	227
Section II Flycatchers and their allies	228
Family Muscicapidae	228
Subfamily Turdinae	229
Subfamily Timaliinae	231
Subfamily Panurinae (Paradoxornithinae)	233
Subfamily Sylviinae	234
Subfamily Muscicapinae (sensu latu)	235
Subfamily Pachycephalinae	236
Section III The arboreal song birds	237
Family Paridae	238
Family Sittidae	238
Family Certhiidae	241
Family Climacteridae	241
Family Dicaeidae	242
Family Nectariniidae	243
Family Zosteropidae	244

C O N T E N T S

14	GLOSSARY	264
	List of generic names quoted	275
	List of common names quoted	283