

BOOK REVIEW

Prasad Ganpule: C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Opp. Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642. Email: prasadganpule@gmail.com

Title: ID HANDBOOK OF EUROPEAN BIRDS (2 Volumes)

Volume 1: 1-632 pp, Volume 2: 633-1056 pp.

Author: Nils van Duivendijk

Publisher: Princeton University Press, 2024

Format: Hardback



These two volumes, Volume 1 – Non-Passerines and Volume 2 – Passerines, serve as the successors to the widely recognized and popular *Advanced Bird ID Handbook – The Western Palearctic* by the same author, originally published in 2011. The earlier book lacked illustrations or photographs and provided only bullet-point listings of species characteristics by plumage type. In contrast, these two volumes use annotated photographs (cut-outs made from pictures) to present as many identification (ID) points as possible, accompanied by short but informative text.

Spanning a total of 1,056 pages, these volumes cover 733 species that have been recorded at least five times within the borders of Europe. As stated by the author, the primary purpose of these books is to provide a comprehensive ID guide, focusing on morphological characteristics through annotated photographs. The taxonomy follows the IOC classification, and a quick index is provided for species groups. The main species accounts include annotated photographs with short descriptions that highlight essential identification features, molt, age, and gender. The photographs are outstanding, and the number of images per species varies. According to the author's introduction, approximately 2,000 photographs were taken over six years specifically for these books! The total number of images used across both volumes exceeds 5,500.

The level of detail in these books is remarkable. For instance, the species account of Pallid Harrier includes 14 photographs, covering adult and juvenile male and female plumages, with annotations detailing key identification features that distinguish it from Montagu's Harrier. Similarly, the Greater Spotted Eagle account features 13 photographs, including images of the rare fulvescens morph. The Pacific Golden Plover section includes 11 photographs, with in-flight images aiding identification. The Red-backed Shrike is represented with seven photographs, including a detailed close-up of the wing structure, showing primary projection and emargination of the primaries, which are crucial for distinguishing it from the Brown Shrike. Additional detailed images, such as undertail coverts in *Locustella* warblers and tail patterns in wheatears, are particularly helpful for identification.

Since all the photo cut-outs are set against a pale blue or pale green background, in rare cases, this can create a slight color cast, giving some images an unusual appearance. However, this is a minor issue and affects only a few photos. Overall, the photo processing and color quality are of a very high standard.

Although this ID guide is primarily designed for European birds, many difficult-to-identify species from India are also covered, making it relevant to Indian birders. These volumes include numerous species found in the Indian Subcontinent, keeping the Indian birdwatching community engaged. The information presented is astounding and up-to-date, incorporating the latest ID criteria. The species accounts for eagles, waders, warblers, gulls, and terns are particularly well-executed.

As a visual ID guide (using photographs rather than illustrations), these books are accessible for both beginners and experienced birdwatchers. While they are not field guides and cannot be carried easily in the field, they will serve as an essential reference for bird identification.

These two volumes are available on Amazon (<https://www.amazon.in/>) for ₹7,730, while websites like NHBS offer them for £66.90 (<https://www.nhbs.com/id-handbook-of-european-birds-2-volume-set>). A PDF version is also available, though it can only be accessed through the Princeton University Press App, which is somewhat unusual.

Overall, I highly recommend these volumes to all birdwatchers interested in bird identification. This set would make an excellent and essential addition to any birdwatcher's library.