

BOOK REVIEW

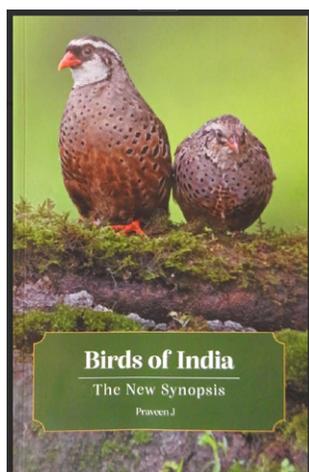
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Title: Birds of India – The New Synopsis (1-511 pp)

Author: Praveen J

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Format: Paperback



This book, written by Praveen J, is a synopsis of the birds of India. The author is well known to bird watchers in India and abroad, and in addition to his other accomplishments, is the chief editor of *Indian BIRDS*. He has published many path-breaking papers in peer-reviewed, reputed Indian and overseas journals, combining field and museum studies.

This book aims to consolidate all available information on the distribution of bird taxa in India, and it succeeds admirably in its aim. This book builds on S. D. Ripley's synopsis published in 1961, followed by the ten-volume 'Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan' by Salim Ali and S. D. Ripley. The taxonomy followed in this synopsis is as per the eBird/Clements Checklist, which is also the taxonomy followed in the 'India Checklist'.

The format of the book is Acknowledgements, Tables of acronyms, an Introduction, a write-up on 'Patterns of subspecies variations in Indian Birds', followed by the main body of the book, and lastly, the Index. The book's main body consists of details of original descriptions, taxonomy, distribution, specimen details and conservation status of 1998 species and subspecies of birds recorded in India, with notes added wherever relevant. These are organised by taxonomic rank – Order, Family, Genus, Species and Subspecies. The introduction contains a write-up on taxonomy and lists the primary sources used to prepare this book. The section regarding the patterns of subspecies variations in Indian birds is fascinating. It provides a detailed overview based on habitats / bio-geographic zones and includes a paragraph on

outstanding and unresolved questions regarding some taxa in India.

The level of detail in this book is remarkable, and this synopsis provides a comprehensive summary of all the bird taxa in India. The information regarding museum specimens is of particular use, wherein the presence of specimens in various museums is listed. The author states that listing the collections where an Indian specimen of any taxon is housed is a key addition to this book compared with Ripley's synopsis. Also included for all species are the IUCN status, the conservation priority categories from State of India's Birds (SoIB) assessments, the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act 2022 (WLPA) schedules, as well as the appendices from CITES and CMS. This information is beneficial for users.

The main content in this synopsis is the distribution data on species and subspecies. The author states that while vagrancy is mentioned, the focus is not on capturing every vagrant record. In this context, this synopsis provides up-to-date distribution information. There are minor issues regarding this data; for example, Gujarat is not mentioned in the distribution for Grey-headed Fish Eagle, though there are many records from the state. Similarly, a record from Jamnagar is given for Black Tern, which was a case of mistaken identification. However, overall, the distribution data is accurate and well-researched. The author acknowledges that more research is required for specific species/subspecies due to identification and/or taxonomic issues, or that the available data has not been evaluated. This gives the reader an idea regarding the complexities in compiling this data and the work involved in putting it together. It is heartening to note that many papers published in our *Flamingo Gujarat* are referenced in this book.

Praveen carried out a herculean task when publishing this book. This is a welcome addition to our country's ornithological literature and provides a thorough synopsis of the birds of India. With updated taxonomy, distribution data, records of museum specimens and other relevant information, it provides a single point of reference for bird taxa in India. This book will be helpful for beginners as well as for experts and researchers and is available online from the NCF store at URL: <https://ncf-store.zohocommerce.in/products/birds-of-india-the-new-synopsis/1638627000002176041> for Rs. 499/-. I highly recommend this book for those interested in our country's ornithology, and it will be an excellent addition to any bird watcher's library.