

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Title:** Birds of the Indian Subcontinent – Second Edition (1-576 pp)

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HELM FIELD GUIDES

# Birds of the Indian Subcontinent

SECOND EDITION



Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp

Almost every birdwatcher in India is familiar with the first edition (published in 2011) of this field guide as it remains one of the most popular field guides in India. The authors need no introduction having published many books on the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. This is the new and updated second edition of the earlier field guide, which is published by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, under 'Helm Field Guides'.

The authors state in the introduction that this book is a fully revised edition of the earlier field guide published in 2011, with 246 colour plates, which are 20 more than in the first edition. The scope of the book is the entire Indian Subcontinent, comprising India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. This edition covers 1429 species for the subcontinent, until the end of 2023. The taxonomy,

nomenclature and English names are followed as per 'eBird' Taxonomy v2023, except for three species which is explained in the 'Taxonomy and nomenclature' section in 'How to use this book'.

The format of the book is as per the earlier edition, with Contents, Acknowledgements, Introduction, 'How to use this book', followed by a write-up on the Indian Subcontinent covering aspects like climate, habitat, threats and conservation. The family summaries follow, after which is the main body of the book. At the end is the appendix of vagrant species, references, illustration credits and index. I must mention here that the artwork of the cover page, depicting a Pied Thrush, is outstanding.

The main attractions of the earlier field guide were the illustrations and the text coupled with maps, which was user friendly and compact to carry in the field. This second edition also has the same quality of illustrations and the text has been improved. The maps too have been updated. The authors state in the introduction that preparing maps was a huge undertaking, and that they have relied on eBird datasets for preparing maps for many species. Small taxonomic notes are given for species in which there is taxonomic uncertainty or where further research is required.

The illustrations are what made this book so well liked earlier and now, in its new version, the illustrations are revised and much better for many species. For example, the illustrations for Red-backed Shrike, Red-tailed Shrike, Isabelline Shrike and Brown Shrike are entirely new, and just stunning! Similarly, the plates for Larus gulls and Locustella warblers have been changed. The text has been re-written to reflect current knowledge; the text for Himalayan Buzzard explains the features to look for its identification and separation from Long-legged Buzzard and Common Buzzard. Species maps show the latest distribution as they are prepared from eBird data.

Making such a book is a huge task and getting the distribution correct for the entire subcontinent is very difficult; there remain some errors in the distribution maps. For example, Gujarat is not shown in the distribution range for Grey-headed Fish Eagle, White-winged Tern or Rusty-tailed Flycatcher, though there are many records of these species from our state. Similarly, single records of vagrant species, like Siberian Rubythroat, Buff-bellied Pipit remain unmapped for Gujarat. Saunder's Tern is shown as a winter visitor to Gujarat though it is a summer breeding migrant. The illustrations for a few

species could have been changed; illustrations of Oriental Honey Buzzard fail to represent its various plumages, and look odd. Similarly, having a single illustration for vagrant species is many times inadequate for on-field identification. With eBird and India checklist moving towards or adopting Avilist taxonomy, there will be a few species for which the treatment adopted in this book will be different from these sources.

Apart from these small issues, this book will be essential to bird watchers in our country as well as for any foreign birder coming to the Indian Subcontinent for birdwatching. The

quality of the illustrations, simple and lucid text and updated maps make this second edition a 'must have' for beginners and experienced bird watchers / ornithologists. The book is available in paperback for Rs. 1599/- and Ebook (pdf, mobi and Epub) is available for Rs. 1439/- from the Bloomsbury India website (<https://www.bloomsbury.com/in/field-guide-to-birds-of-the-indian-subcontinent-9781472984784/>) and will probably soon be available online from different websites. I highly recommend this book and it will be useful even for those who have the first edition of this wonderful field guide.