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**Journal of
Threatened
TAXA**

Open Access

10.11609/jott.2022.14.11.22039-22206

www.threatenedtaxa.org

26 November 2022 (Online & Print)

14(11): 22039-22206

ISSN 0974-7907 (Online)

ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

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Cover: Mugger Crocodile basking on the banks of Savitri River at Mahad in Maharashtra, India. © Utkarsha M. Chavan.



Decoding a group of winged migrants!

Review by Priyanka Iyer 

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Waders are a group of birds that are awe-inspiring and dainty but many a birder has struggled with identification of this vast group in the Indian subcontinent. To address this concern Harkirat Singh Sangha has written a comprehensive hardbound book titled, "Waders of the Indian Subcontinent".

The book has an excellent compilation of information on 84 species of waders including some of the rare and cryptic species. The book aptly handles wader identification characters with clear illustrations, geographic range with a large enough maps for each species, past works and gives briefs about each of these publications (both pre and post-independence). Some of the other topics relevant to understanding waders, migration, flyways, and all the habitats preferred by waders including specific sites where migratory waders are recorded, are succinctly covered.

Not only does the book cover ecological and historic factors but also gives a brief account of the threats that are affecting waders such as habitat loss and degradation, pollution, hunting, and global warming. This is followed by existing conservation measures/projects including citizen science initiatives and briefly mentions the Ramsar Convention, Important Bird Areas, Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, and Convention on Migratory Species which gives the avid birder a basic understanding of the existing tools for conservation of this fantastic group.

The chapter on using this book is helpful and states how this book is a labour of love, something that is evident in the product itself for a lot of painstaking effort has gone into the minute details of the book.

The colour plates in the book are a good attempt and there are many illustrations for each species in different moults, stages of development (breeding, non-breeding, juvenile) and variations are also well showcased.

The species accounts have great detail including behaviours, status, conservation, and maps are large as

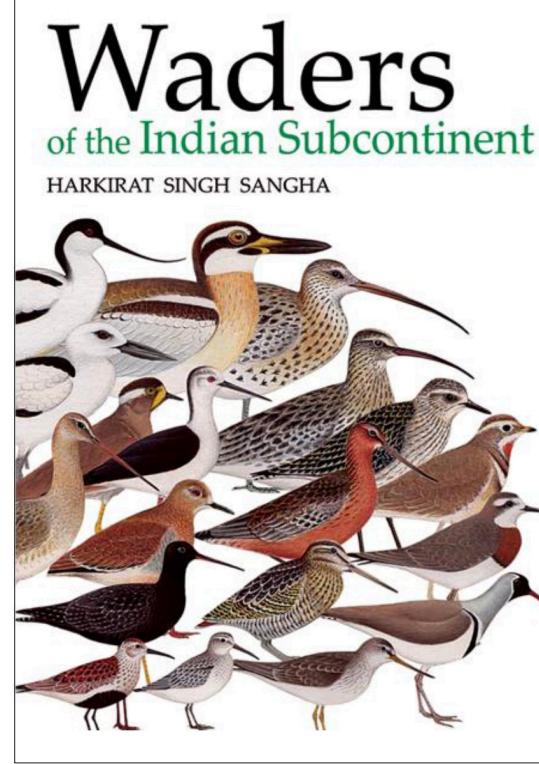
Published 2021

Format: Hardback. Edition: 1st

536 pages

ISBN: 9789354266966

Publisher: Self-published (partly supported by WWF-India)



Date of publication: 26 November 2022 (online & print)

Citation: Iyer, P. (2022). Decoding a group of winged migrants! *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 14(11): 22203-22204. <https://doi.org/10.11609/jott.8278.14.11.22203-22204>

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opposed to the ones seen in field guides. Each species is represented with local names, old names, taxonomy, distribution, field characters, description (different ages/stages), racial variation, measurements, moults, vocalizations, general habits, food/foraging, breeding, habitat, movements, status & conservation, and ample photographs in various life stages, habitats, & natural light setting. This in itself is a testament to the amount of research and detailing that has gone into each species. There is also a special section not seen in field guides regarding confusion species wherein it gives the birder information and fair warning about how species 'a' may get confused with species 'b' for specific reasons. This is especially useful when tackling a group such as waders.

Each species account is very well detailed and the author has not held back any information for lack of space and this makes the book very comprehensive. The layout is neat and each photograph is well placed, including photographs of young chicks in some cases which is again helpful in case of nest sighting in the field. Each photograph is credited individually and the photographers range far and wide. The book has a total

of 540 original paintings and 450 colour photographs which in itself is a stupendous task when looking at 84 species. For the purpose of this book the Indian subcontinent refers to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Chagos. The book is a treasure trove of information and kudos to the author on this great effort. I would like to add that the book is slightly larger and heavier than a regular field guide but for avid birders it can prove extremely useful.

On the whole the book has covered all aspects connected to waders and has made references to most of the past studies on waders in the Indian subcontinent. It is undoubtedly a great book to not only identify but also understand ecology, behaviour, migration, and conservation of these complex groups.

Some of the aspects that would have improved this publication are some minor grammar issues, spacing consistency, and layout lapses. I am sure some of these challenges can be tackled in the next edition of this book. I would whole-heartedly recommend this book as a great book to start identifying and understanding waders holistically.



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NAAS rating (India) 5.64

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