

Book review

BIRDS OF JAPAN

By O. Chikara

2019. Published by Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. 385 pp.
Flexi-cover, Euro €48.00 (~AU\$78) ISBN 9788416728121

The author of the book, Otani Chikara, graduated from the University of Tokyo. He has been involved with bird surveys, in Japan, for 30 years and was a bird guide for 15 years.

This is a field guide. It has a vinyl or vinyl like water resistant flexi-cover. The book's range encompasses all of Japanese archipelago spanning more than 3000 km from north-east to south-west. It includes many external islands claimed by Japan: southward to Yaeyama Islands near Taiwan, eastward to the tropical Ogasawara Islands and northward to Russian Far East. South Korea's Dok-do (aka Takeshima) are correctly not included.

As with other field guides in the Lynx BirdLife International series this is formulaically structured with an elementary introduction with sub-sections on: geographic scope, climate and habitats. These are followed by a very basic outline on conservation threats and a list giving the status of threatened birds. Just over four pages are then devoted to generalized birding and hotspots. Most of the book (340 out of 385 pages) is then given to species accounts. The maps, figures and other sundry metrics are a high quality and appear to be taken from *HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo and Collar 2014–2016). Following the species accounts there is a short half page reference section followed by indexes, one of which is in Japanese. The book is in English. Lynx's homepage for the book indicated that 740 species are dealt with including 30 endemics, which are identified by 1800 colour illustrations and 550 colour maps. There are QR codes (Quick Response Codes) for each species, which allow devices, such as mobile phones, to link to Lynx's *Internet Bird Collection* webpages.

The book primarily addresses an English and perhaps tourist audience. Japan is an iconic tourist destination for peoples from both Asian and Western countries. Thus, it was essential that it be written in English, a commonly shared language. There is an index in Japanese (yet I assume that the Japanese people would prefer an all Japanese version). Despite all the English, this guide will still prove useful for Japanese residents. Foreign researchers will surely benefit from the English. Perhaps having the index of Japanese names, which are repeated through the species accounts will also help internally in Japan.

To my mind the strength of this book lies in its extreme coverage from Artic landscapes in the north, through alpine meadows in Hokkaido, to sub-tropical islands in the Pacific. It succeeds in being a dedicated field guide—although it will not fit into my pocket, but will fit into my backpack. Japan has a long history of taking an interest in its birds and a long history of scientific research, both these provide a sturdy foundation on

which this book will help build an even greater knowledge of Japanese birds.

The species accounts are well structured and adequate, they give the birds' names in English and Japanese alongside the scientific names. Global and Japanese conservation statuses are given with the latter following the Japanese Red List 2018 (National Red List 2019), which was not cited in their references). General status and measurements, subspecies comments, plumage and other identifying characteristics including voices are also given in the detailed species accounts. Numbers of extant species per family are given at the start of each family. The pictures and maps on the right facing pages are of high quality, they are quickly readable and diagnostically useful for purpose.

This book will enable quick identification for researchers and other professionals, and tourists. It is a field guide aimed at English speakers and thus, in Japan, it will be most useful for visitors. In that sense it is entirely fit for purpose: sufficient and pertinent. The writing style is clear and succinct as was intended. Alas, as with other field-guides in this series, I found it light on breeding periods. Short crisp notes on breeding would have made it a more useful field guide. Breeding plumage and nests being things that bird observers would want to know more about.

It is hard to determine how well this book was researched with too few citations given and I noted that one was clearly missing. It is however derived from *HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo and Collar 2014–2016) and as such is surely well researched.

The supplementary material, beyond the maps and drawings of the species accounts, amount to two regional maps situated inside the front and rear covers. Both are easily read: the front gives the names of places and the rear gives the numbers of the birding hotspots, which coincide with notes given in the Introduction. I would recommend this book to those travelling to Japan or within its extensive archipelago, it may even be quite useful in nearby South Korea. It is also useful for those bird-watchers and students of ornithology in Japan who are comfortable reading English.

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References

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- National Red List (2019). *Red List of Threatened Species of Japan*. Available at <https://www.nationalredlist.org/red-list-of-threatened-species-of-japan/> [verified 5 October 2019].