

## Review

### **Birds of the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Conservation Area**

**Adam Scott Kennedy**

**2014, Princeton University Press, Wild Guides, ISBN 978-0-691-15910-2, 224 pp., full colour Price: US\$27.95 / £17.95**

*Birds of the Serengeti* (and its sister publication, *Birds of the Masai Mara*) is a new type of field guide for us in East Africa. It is a guide to the birds most likely to be seen, rather than all species recorded. The birds are grouped by habitat, rather than taxonomy; the author uses photographs, rather than drawings; and the birds are set in their natural surroundings. So the birds are 'as you see them' in nature – or at least, as you usually see them.

The book starts by introducing its novel approach and the habitats, which include sections on birds of the air, night birds and Lake Victoria specials. The grouping of birds by habitat is obviously most suitable for a local guide, where the habitats are limited and the species' preferences well known. Each habitat is represented by a magnificent photograph, a description with examples of sites, and smaller photos of a couple of characteristic birds. The birds of each habitat are then featured in detail.

Each bird is shown as a large colourful photo that includes the typical vegetation – or sand, water, blue sky. With some computer trickery, similar species are compared side by side in their habitat. The computer wizardry can be confusing at times, with the birds grouped together in their leafy or grassy habitat, but their names and descriptions scattered across two pages.

The text is peppered with useful tips for identifying birds. For instance, three 'coloured doves' are shown in a composite image at a bird feeder: Ring-necked, Red-eyed and African Mourning Doves (*Streptopelia capicola*, *semitorquata* and *decepiens*). In addition to a brief description of their appearance, habits and songs, there is a section on telling these three doves apart, very useful for a beginner. Names used in other parts of Africa are often included, a help to the confused traveller. And for those moments when there are no birds to be seen, there are fun facts to educate and entertain non-birding companions.

The result of this innovative approach is superb. It guides the layman on where to look for birds and what to look for. I wish there was such a field guide for every Important Bird Area (IBA) in East Africa! The only drawback is the price, obviously out of reach for most local communities.

**Fleur Ng'weno**