

The Birds of the Iberian Peninsula

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BOOK REVIEW

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The Birds of the Iberian Peninsula by Eduardo de Juana and Ernest Garcia. 2015. Christopher Helm, London, UK. 688 pages, 32 color plates, 64 photographs, 216 text figures, 55 tables. \$85 (hardcover). ISBN 978-1-4081-2480-2.

Published 16 years after the last comprehensive work on the birds of the Iberian Peninsula, *Aves Ibéricas* I and II (Tellería et al. 1996, 1999), this is the first modern volume dedicated to the Iberian avifauna written in English and addressed to an entirely international audience. It is also the first one encompassing, with comparable effort, information from the two main countries integrating this (ornithologically) important region of the western Palearctic, Spain, and Portugal.

Authored by two experts on Iberian birds, Eduardo de Juana and Ernest Garcia, this extensive volume represents an impressive and successful attempt to compile and synthesize all the information required by amateur and professional ornithologists to attain a profound and updated (to December 2013) knowledge of present-day Iberian avifaunal composition, distribution, habitat preferences, phenology, and movements. In addition, species accounts include, when available or relevant, information on population trends and conservation issues. The authors have left out general information on taxonomy and breeding biology/ecology, as is usually the case in such works (which are between field guides and world or regional handbooks).

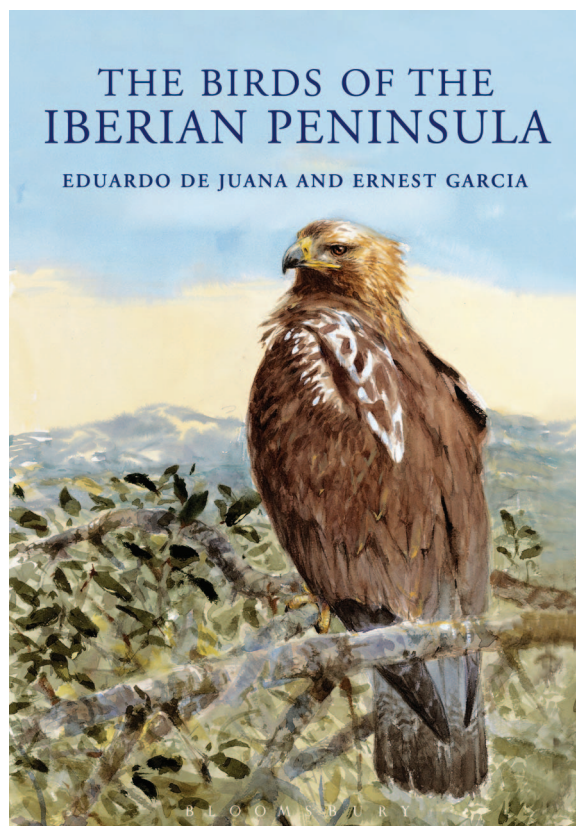
The volume starts with a Preface in which the geographic scope of the work is presented. This basically

comprises the four political entities of the Peninsula: Spain, Portugal, Andorra, and Gibraltar. However, it is important to keep in mind that the entirety of the two main Iberian countries, Spain and Portugal, is not encompassed in the work: The distant Macaronesian

archipelagos—that is, the Canary Islands (Spain) and the Azores and Madeira Islands (Portugal)—are excluded. Contrarily, all the small Portuguese and Spanish islands surrounding the Peninsula, plus the relatively large Balearic Islands (Spain), are considered.

The species accounts are preceded by five sections that are of great interest in themselves for non-Iberian readers, but also highly useful for understanding and interpreting the species-specific information provided later. The first of them is a brief history of avifaunal accounts carried out in Iberia from the mid-19th century to the present day. This historical outline is followed by a physiographic and climatic description of the Peninsula, providing a description of the great environmental heterogeneity of this region, often unsuspected

by nonfamiliarized readers. In this section, simple but informative maps (elevation, precipitation, bioclimatic zonation) and tables allow straightforward interpretation. An interesting and somewhat critical comment on what climate trends should be observed in Iberia, according to forecasted climatic changes, is also included in this section. A description of the main habitat types for birds follows, including purely anthropogenic ones such as farmland and urban areas, which are becoming increasingly important



for conservation in the current context of land-use transformation. As a minor critical note on this section, authors use the term “plant community” to refer to certain broad habitat types (e.g., “Eurosiberian plant communities”), which might be misleading if one thinks strictly of ecological communities. Perhaps the word “formations” would have been more consistent with the more physiographic sense of other terms used such as “sandy beaches” and “inland cliffs.”

The Iberian avifauna is described as a whole in the following section. This overview, centered mainly on species composition, geographic distribution, and phenological and movement patterns, is critical for the reader to acquire a global idea of Iberian avifauna and provides the conceptual context to interpret species accounts. This is a major strength of this work. Of particular value are the tables compiling different groups of species: those that are endemic or nearly-endemic, those characterizing biogeographic regions, those showing increasing or declining trends, or the recent incorporations to Iberian avifauna, either alien or naturally established. All this information is completed with a suite of impressive photographs of main habitats for birds and some of the most distinctive species. The last section before the accounts is a thorough description of how these were prepared, providing details on the main sources of ornithological information (bibliographic, ring recoveries, historical, and rarity records) and nomenclature (for English, Spanish, and Portuguese names) and how they are specified in the accounts, which includes examples of distribution maps (breeding and wintering) and graphs (e.g., monthly distributions of a species' records). Particularly useful for non-Iberian readers are a concise description of Spain's and Portugal's administrative territorial divisions and a list of localities relevant for birds in the Peninsula and the Balearic Islands, both accompanied by maps.

The criteria for the order of the accounts are not clear, although they show some resemblance to the phylogenetic criteria used in the *Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo and Collar 2014). This may lead unsuspecting readers to look for a particular species in the wrong part of the volume, so that a warning in the Preface about the criteria that were followed would have been useful. Accounts differ for nonvagrant and vagrant species, the latter being limited to the species' status in the western Palearctic, the history of their records in Iberia, the numbers involved, and their record distribution and phenology. For nonvagrants, information covers subspecies, breeding and/or wintering population estimates (including trends when available), distribution and habitat preferences, movement patterns, phenology, and relevant

conservation aspects. Of course, each account's extent varies according to the data available, and although there may be a few recent references (always prior to January 2014) missing for some species, the information provided reaches the highest standards for a work of this kind.

The volume closes with five useful appendices with information regarding populations of introduced species near self-sustained growth, species in each conservation category, species other than birds mentioned in the text, the Spanish regional reports consulted for the work, and the Spanish and Portuguese rarity reports endorsed by Spain's and Portugal's rarity committees. The addresses of the latter, along with that of Gibraltar's rarity committee, are provided. Finally, all species can be easily located through an index of English names that follows the extensive reference list.

I will finish this review with a couple of minor comments on the volume's format, although I perfectly understand that format features are always a trade-off between critical information and editorial limitations. For readers from western Palearctic countries who are familiar with most of the species included in this work, the book is quite self-contained, but those from other regions might need to complement their use of the volume with a regional field guide. While that might be unavoidable, the inclusion of simple species illustrations (black and white) would have made the book more enjoyable. Finally, the use of a somehow larger font size would have also been helpful for many users. Nonetheless, and in spite of the very minor critical remarks, the volume by De Juana and Garcia constitutes a landmark work, occupying a publication niche that is vacant thus far, from which both professionals and amateurs can profit, and whose format and scientific quality are outstanding in the growing recent regional, subregional, and local avifaunal accounts.

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