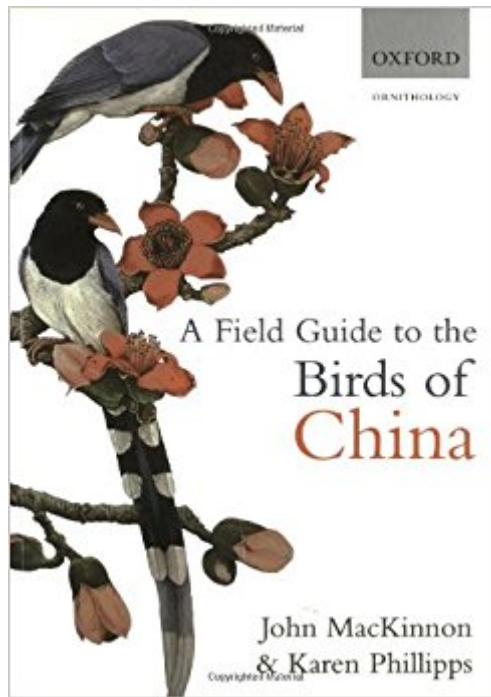


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# A Field Guide To The Birds Of China



## Synopsis

China is one of the largest countries in the world, covering 7% of the earth's land surface, and encompassing a hugely diverse range of habitats. As a result it boasts a rich and diverse avifauna, including some of the most spectacular and fascinating birds to be found anywhere in the world. John MacKinnon and Karen Phillipps' important new guide will be the first truly comprehensive, taxonomically modern, and fully illustrated field guide to the birds of China. Over 1300 bird species are illustrated in 128 original colour paintings, by Karen Phillipps and Dave Showler. The species accounts stress the key points for field recognition and give a full description of the plumage, voice, range, distribution, status, and behavioral characteristics for every bird, with additional descriptions provided for hundreds of subspecies. Colour distribution maps are provided for all illustrated species. The book also includes a useful introductory section that presents a background to the ecology of China, a brief history of Chinese ornithology, and plenty of practical hints on birdwatching in China. The guide's portable format means it will fit easily into a backpack or pocket. John MacKinnon lived in China and Hong Kong for eight years, and has extensive experience of watching and writing about Chinese birds. He has been working in ecology and conservation in Asia for over 30 years, and his work in China included co-authoring the master plan to save the Giant Panda and its habitat. He has written and co-authored many books on the natural history of Asia, including a number of other bird guides. Karen Phillipps was born in Borneo, lived in Hong Kong for over 20 years, and has illustrated several other books on the birdlife of the region.

## Book Information

Paperback: 858 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (August 10, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0198549407

ISBN-13: 978-0198549406

Product Dimensions: 7.8 x 1.6 x 5.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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## Customer Reviews

A Field Guide to the Birds of China is a must for any traveler who wants to identify birds in China. De Schauensee's earlier Birds of China is not really a field guide although it provides useful background reading. A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan includes a lot of the species occurring in eastern China, and the Beijing area is included in most of the range maps, so if you don't have the MacKinnon-Phillips new guide, this is second best. All species of known regular occurrence somewhere in China are illustrated in excellent drawings by Karen Phillips, all but a few in full color. Colored range maps are on the page facing each of the 128 plates. The text for each species provides a detailed description, voice, distribution and status, habits (useful), and in some cases a note on taxonomy. I used this book for more than two weeks in China during October 2001 and confidently identified every bird I got a decent look at. (Regrettably, eastern China is not exactly overrun with exotic birds, but you can find some interesting species even in the cities.) The most noticeable problem with this book is its sheer bulk; at 256 pages of plates, 586 pages of text, and some front material, this monster tops out at well over 800 pages and won't fit in most fanny packs, not to mention pockets. So taking a utility knife with a new blade, I sliced the spine following the last plate and taped the last page to the spine, creating a book of front matter, 10 pages of introduction and all the plates and range maps--a tad over a third the thickness of the whole book. A few species are illustrated in black-and-white in the text, so I xeroxed those (with their black-and-white range maps) and pasted them below the range maps of appropriate plates. I left the text home.

I visit Taiwan at least once a year, and always make it a point to do as much birding as possible. The main problem I have faced in the past has been finding a good English language field guide. I have always used James Wan-Fu Chang's "Field Guide to the Birds of Taiwan" (ISBN-13: 978-0917056437), and Wu Sen-Hsiong's "A Field Guide to the Birds of Taiwan" (ISBN 957-9578-00-1). Both books are very good, and highly recommended. However, each has its drawbacks. The main one being that both are written in Chinese, although Chang's guide does have very brief descriptions of range, habitat and status in English. In addition, both books are a bit out-dated. The MacKinnon & Phillips guide addresses these drawbacks. For starters, it is written entirely in English. The paintings are generally of high quality, and differences between subspecies are indicated. Range maps are also shown on the page facing the paintings. The descriptions of many (but not all) species are fairly well detailed, and the ranges for subspecies is also described. The guide does have some minor problems, which are probably unavoidable. Because of the large geographical size of the area covered, and the number of species described (over 1300), the guide is quite bulky - and somewhat expensive. In addition, the descriptions are in the back of

the guide, rather than on the page adjacent to the paintings, making it somewhat inconvenient to use. As I have alluded above, some of the species descriptions, particularly those of the Taiwan endemics, seemed to have been glossed over (perhaps to save space in an already sizable guide). And although most of the paintings are of high quality, not all were. Overall, I think they are slightly inferior to those of the Wu guide. That being said, no field guide is perfect.

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