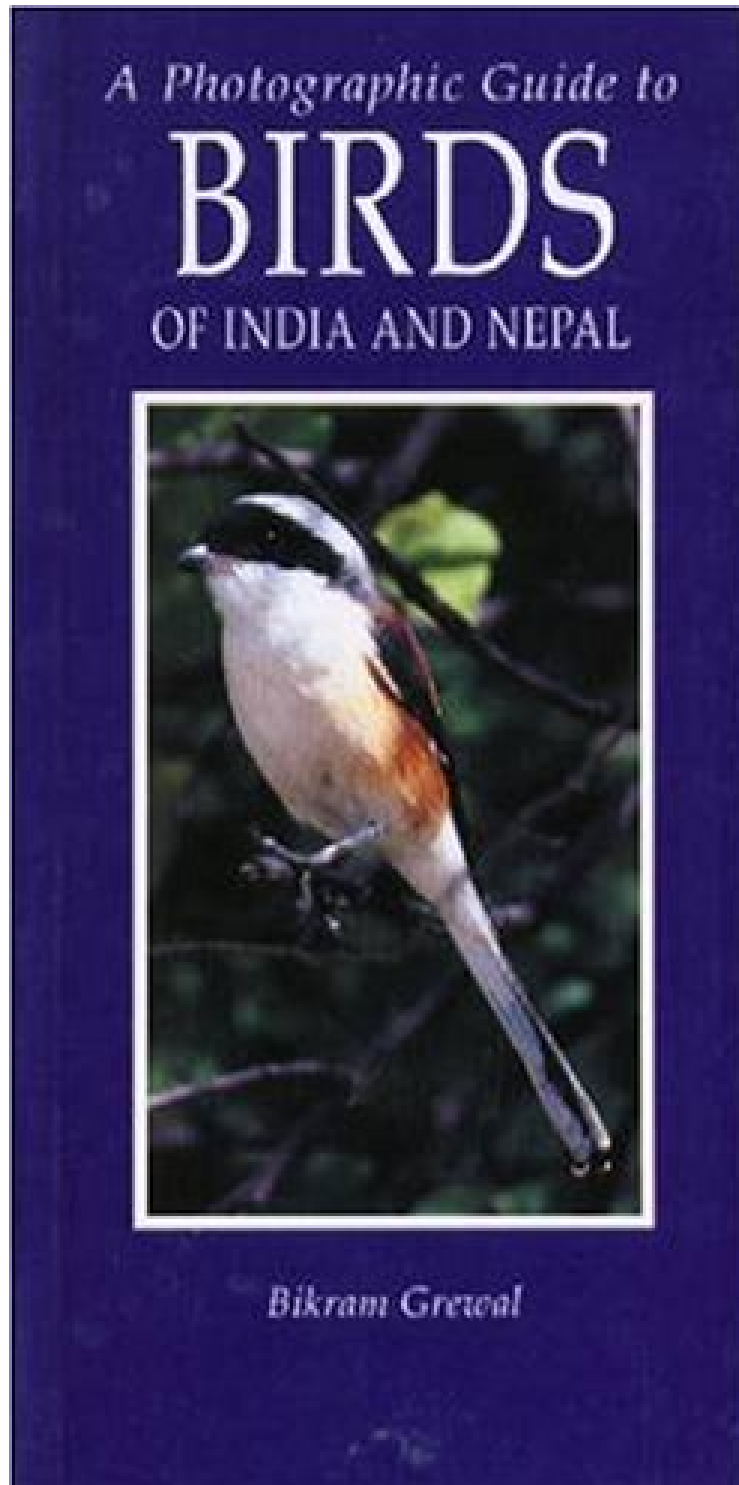


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Photographic Guide to Birds of India and Nepal: Also Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

Bikram Grewal

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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Photographic Guide to Birds of India and Nepal: Also Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka:

14 of 18 people found the following review helpful. A Photographic Misguide. By Aniket Nagle Years of birds and birdwatching has proved that for the purpose of reference books or field guides, good illustrations win hands down over photographs. A photograph of a bird is O.K. till it stays in a personal collection or, at most, in an exhibition where wannabe birdwatchers can drool over it. For a serious birdwatcher in a field, a photograph is useless. And it's not that there is a lack of illustrators. They virtually abound: Carl D' Silva, John H. Dick, Martin Woodcock, Irani, just to name a few. Some of the "features" of this book, mentioned at the back, are ironies in themselves. The first one reads: "Distinctive thumbnail colour tabs outlining each family group to enable quick identification" The tabs in question are little coloured squares at the top left and top right of each alternating left and right pages respectively indicating the family of the birds on that particular page, the key to which is located on page 7. The so-called quick identification of a bird family is the last thing on a birdwatcher's mind. Perchance the reference is to the birds themselves, then, well it will be an insult to the reader's intellect if I say that a commonly accepted vernacular name of a species renders any such tabs meaningless. Anyway, the process of identifying a family with the help of these tabs is anything but quick. The second one says: "Compact, easy-to-use format; the ideal pocket-size travelling companion". Oh yes, this book is compact alright. And it fits into the pocket very easily. The photographs are small to begin with and in some cases, legs of birds are neatly cut off (Peregrine Falcon, pg 44; Great Horned Owl, pg 77). The distribution maps are even smaller and vague to the extreme. A cheap Agatha Christie is a better travelling companion than this. The third goes: "Authoritative text describing key identification features". This "authoritative text", dear reader, is a detailed description of plumage followed by habitat, some general characters and call. The first part (plumage description) takes up 85% of the text and so there remains little space for the rest of the things. Compare this with the precise notes of "A Book of Indian Birds" (Salim Ali) or the to-the-point, brief but short accompaniment of "A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent" (Salim Ali, S. Dillon Ripley). And now the main problem of photographs. They are, as I said earlier, small. And they depict only the male of the species: no winter and summer plumages in water birds, no phases in raptors, no immatures, no females. Just one plain colour photograph of each species (Totaling 252, as the only sincere "feature" says). Each species is accompanied by a detailed description of plumage (Refer to Feature 3). This itself shows the author's lack of trust in the credibility of the photographs to act as useful guides. The reader may argue that a single photograph is space saving; but I assure that any birdwatcher will prefer a 30x30 1 ton book on the field provided that it is competent rather than this pretty guide which is, like all pretty things, worthless. Most of the photographs are tolerable to a little extent, but some really blow you off. Try, for example, to make out birds from their shadows: Chestnut Bittern (p 22), Kalij Pheasant (p 49), Red Junglefowl (p 50), Tailor Bird (p 117), Lesser Whitethroat (p 118). Or, if you prefer grass and other foliage, you can try your hand at Honey Buzzard (p 36), Grey Partridge (p 47), Jungle Bush Quail (p 48), Bengal Florican (p 56), Common Fantail Snipe (p 63), Sylark (p 92), Black Bulbul (p 108). Many smaller birds are shown in nests and I will and I will name them as "breeding unidentifiables": Common Wood Shrike (p 104), Common Iora (p 105), Goldfronted Leafbird (p 106), Yellow-eyed Babbler (p 109), Quaker Babbler (p 112), Streaked Fantail Warbler (p 116), Ashy Wren Warbler (p 117), Tickell's Flowerpecker (p 129). Two are even shown being held in hand: Paddyfield Warbler (p 118), Goldfinch (p 137). That is the problem: birds, photographed in their natural surroundings will certainly present all these problems, whereas in illustrations, it is in the artist's hand to depict a bird as he wants. All the photographs are excellent in themselves; but in the context of a field guide, they are wasted. The choice of birds also beats logic. The book contains 252 species which are obviously meant to be common. But the Pelicans (p 15), Swamp Partridge (p 48), Black-necked Crane (p 52), Siberian Crane (p 58), Slaty-headed Parakeet (p 74), the Nightjars (p 79), Blue-bearded Bee-eater (p 84), Red-billed Chough (p 102), White-throated Laughing Thrush (p 111), Streaked River Chat (p 123), Cinnamon Tree Sparrow (p 132), Allied Grosbeak (p 137), the Buntings (p 139) are all relatively uncommon and restricted. Some birds which are more common and which, I feel, should have been included are: Intermediate Egret, Black Eagle, Pale Harrier, Common Bustard-Quail, Satyr Tragopan, Demoiselle Crane, Houbara, Indian Plaintive Cuckoo, Common Indian Nightjar, Palm Swift, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Indian Cliff Swallow, Swallow (at least one of them), Red-headed Bunting, Black-headed Bunting. Obviously, the availability of photographs ruled the list of birds. It is surprising, because logic says that the photographs of commoner birds should be more available than rare ones. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Useful little travelling companion guide By Foniqua Useful little travelling companion guide. Nice photographs for easy identifications. Maps could use a little more detail, but its "pocket-size", so you make do. Overall I enjoyed having it on my journey.

Pocket-sized photo guide to 252 species of birds in Indian and Nepal. Features individual accounts and a color photo for each species covered.