

Roberts' VII – a unique opportunity for birders' input

Over the past four years, the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, under the editorial management of Professor Phil Hockey, Dr Richard Dean and Dr Peter Ryan, has been rewriting *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*. This has involved a team of 55 ornithologists in preparing up-to-date identification and biological accounts for the 951 southern African bird species. You can read all about the project on the *Roberts'* webpage, at <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/fitzpatrick/docs/roberts.html>

What makes *Roberts' VII* unique as a project is not that it draws on the experience of more than 50 experts to write species texts, nor that additional experts are involved in formally reviewing these texts. Rather, the process of public review has been embraced for the first time anywhere in the production of a regional ornithological handbook. Anyone with access to the Internet can view the texts and contribute to the review process (see below how to access this site). Thus, the project aims to draw on the expertise of as many ornithologists and birders as possible. And you don't have to be a professional ornithologist to be taken seriously! Some significant contributions



A plate from the forthcoming Roberts' VII, showing cuckooshrikes, orioles and drongos.

continue to be made by knowledgeable birders.

Despite the wealth of knowledge accumulated in recent years, there are still many gaps in our information base. For a listing of

these unknowns, you can visit the 'missing data' section of all the draft texts currently on the Internet. We are aware that a great deal of valuable data may be lurking in notebooks, filing cabinets

and personal data collections. Many of these data, especially those relating to moult, mass and measurements, are more valuable than their owners may realise. If you are in possession of unpublished data that you would like to contribute to *Roberts' VII*, please contact the project manager, Sharon Maree, at roberts@botzoo.uct.ac.za or fax it to (021) 650 3295.

All completed first-draft texts are currently available on the Internet. You will find a listing of all the southern African families at <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/fitzpatrick/docs/listlink.html>, and will be able to find the species you want by scrolling down to the family in which you are interested (for example Family Indicatoridae: Honeyguides), and clicking on the link. Each species text has a comprehensive summary at the end of the page, listing all the information that editors and authors have been unable to locate in the published literature.

The time and manpower taken to establish this 'public Internet review process' is not trivial. The editorial team sincerely hopes that people will take the time to look at these accounts and comment constructively (rather than searching for shortcomings in the book after its publication, which is scheduled for the second half of 2004). □

Visit the FitzPatrick website: <http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za>

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