

## Kowa BD42x10 Prominar

**K**owa is renowned for its spotting scopes, which are on a par with the best in the world. It is therefore perhaps surprising that its binoculars are not as well known. In the last comprehensive binocular review in *African Birdlife* (March/April 2013, pages 48-52), Kowa dominated the panel's top choices for mid-range models, so I was looking forward to subjecting some of its binoculars to a field review.

The first model was the BD42x10 Prominar, which supersedes the BD42-10 binoculars. The new model sports improved specifications at an even lower price, thanks in large measure to its manufacture in China. But don't let this put you off – Kowa has not sacrificed quality for price.

I typically prefer the smaller and lighter 32mm objective binoculars, but this 10x42 is surprisingly compact and feels lighter than its 655 grams. Even when fitted with the broad, comfortable neoprene neck strap and rain guard, it weighs only

730 grams. If this is still too heavy for your taste, the BD series is also available with 32mm objective lenses. Both models come in 10 and 8 times magnification, with the 32mm objective models weighing around 20 per cent less than the 42mm review model. There's also an even bigger 56mm objective range – available in 8, 10 and 12 times magnification – but they weigh 1.1 kilograms and are not ideal for extended field use unless you want to build up your biceps.

The 10x42 fitted nicely in my hands. The large plastic eye-cups, which can be set to one of four positions, were equally comfortable and easy to use for a protracted period. Build quality appears to be good, with a magnesium composite chassis and solid rubber armour; one online review reported they survived a heavy fall unscathed. As you would expect, the binoculars are waterproof and filled with dry nitrogen to prevent fogging or fungal growth on the lenses. The only slight negative was the absence of a lock on the dioptre adjustment wheel that is located just below the right eye-piece.

Image quality is one of the most important criteria when selecting binoculars and as one might anticipate from a top scope manufacturer, Kowa's BD42x10 didn't disappoint. The twin Prominar XD objective lenses provide a bright, sharp image with only a hint of drop-off towards the very edge of the field of view. I had only two minor reservations: the field of view was a bit narrow at six degrees (108 metres at 1000 metres) and magnification was not



*The compact design of the BD42x10 makes them feel smaller than most binoculars of that size.*

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entirely uniform across the field of view, which was apparent when panning.

The rather garish silver central focus knob is well positioned and nicely responsive. Depth of field is excellent, requiring relatively little effort to track from infinity to 10 metres. The minimum focus distance is claimed to be 1.5 metres; I thought it was closer to two metres, but it was still more than adequate for all my requirements.

Kowa's BD42x10 binoculars come with a plastic rain guard, rubberised objective covers that can be mounted on the objective barrels if so desired, and a no-nonsense nylon carry case. I used them for several days in the field and did not feel that I was missing out at all compared to my usual, more expensive binoculars. Retailing at around R6500, they offer great value for money to the budget-conscious birder.

PETER RYAN



*The large silver focus wheel is smooth and responsive.*