

Review

100 Common Bird Calls in East Africa (book and CD)

Dave Richards and Brian Finch

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In this review, I shall attempt to convince readers that improving your knowledge of bird sounds can make you a happier person. My review copy of this book has just been delivered and as soon as I open the parcel, a big smile spreads across my face. The cover is bright and attractive with a good selection of high quality images splashed across it. Inside, there are brief and concise introductions to bird calls and how to use the book before 100 species are illustrated and described. Anyone familiar with Dave Richards' photography will already know that his work is among the best in the region, being bright, sharp and with superb colouration. Favourite images of mine within this book include the Hartlaub's Turaco *Tauraco hartlaubi* (p. 17), Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike *Chlorophoneus sulfureopectus* (p. 34), and African Citril *Crithagra citrinelloides* (p. 61). The species descriptions are light and aimed at the novice although I cannot recall a book on East African birds that provides such good information on bird nests and, for the majority of species, eggs too and this should be commended. Also of note are the species names in Swahili as well as English, although scientific names have been sacrificed. For the target audience, I agree with this decision although, from my experience, I'll bet the majority of Swahili-speakers will know more of the featured species by their English names. The index usefully provides page numbers, and track numbers for the CD that is conveniently contained within a neat vinyl pouch on the rear inside cover.

As I slide the CD into my laptop and hit 'Play', I am introduced to the first species – Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*. Like some smells and other sounds, bird calls have the ability to prompt memories and emotions and my mind immediately takes me back to the Masai Mara where I had countless encounters with this splendid, yet comical, species. A good feature about the bird calls on this CD is the variety of call types provided, so not only is the frequently-heard, agitated, grating call of the guineafowl given but also the repeated mournful whistle that I always associate with birds heading to roost in the evening. The quality of sound files is very good and Brian has also provided a meaningful description of the songs and calls in the species descriptions. Some are especially useful for helping the reader remember the species calling, especially the Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* ('I am a Red-eyed Dove') and Ring-necked Dove *S. capicola* ('work harder'). It's good fun to come up with your own 'translations' to accompany bird calls too. As I reach track 83, I turn up the volume and watch my wife's face as I play the song of White-browed Robin Chat *Cossypha heuglini*. Vicki immediately looks up from her book, shakes her head and slams her book down as the memory arrives. "Oh no. That bird still sends shivers through me!", she laughs and I know exactly what she's talking about. While managing a safari camp in Tanzania, we were unceremoniously woken by these noisy birds at 5:30 a.m. every day. Yes, sometimes the memories that bird calls bring with them are not so nice but I'll wager that most calls will trigger some kind of response, good or bad, for most listeners. Thinking back, I have a good memory for every single bird call on this CD so I can say with certainty that bird calls make me happy.

I have struggled to find faults with this book. It is difficult to separate similar-looking species by appearance, particularly the two featured nightjars and robin chats, although this is probably not the main aim of the book. Also, the image for Nubian Woodpecker *Campethera nubica* on p. 32 actually shows a female Golden-tailed Woodpecker *C. abingoni*, as identified by the heavily streaked, not spotted, underparts.

In summary, I highly recommend this book for beginners and occasional birders and I am confident that it will not only improve your birding skills but will also bring extra happiness into your life!

Adam Scott Kennedy