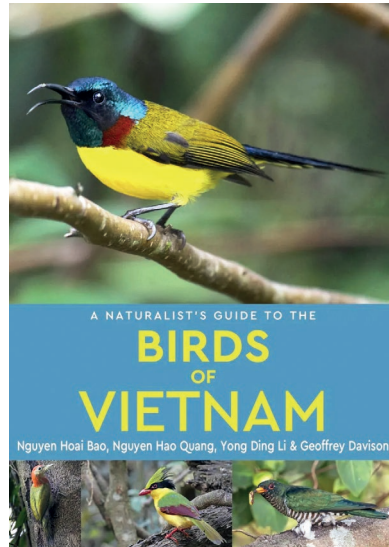


A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of Vietnam by Nguyen Hoai Bao, Nguyen Hao Quang, Yong Ding Li and Geoffrey Davison. John Beaufoy Publishing Oxford, UK. 2025. 176 pp. ISBN 978-1912081417 (softcover).



The well-known *Naturalist's Guide* series from John Beaufoy Publishing aims to provide accessible, easy-to-use, introductory yet informative photographic guides to biota of particular countries. Past guides in the series have covered mammals, reptiles, butterflies and even trees, country-by-country as well as, mostly, and inevitably, birds.

The present book, *A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of Vietnam*, is the seventh guide to the birds of a Southeast Asian country. It follows a similar format to its predecessors, presenting high-quality photographs, accompanied by concise species texts, for a selection of 280 species from the total of 921 species listed for Vietnam in the checklist at the end of the book. Extending across 15 degrees of latitude, along the western flank of the richly forested Annamite Mountains, Vietnam is one of the most exciting and species-rich of all mainland Southeast Asian countries, supporting many endemic or range-restricted bird species.

A commendably pragmatic approach to choosing which species to include and which to omit is taken. Only two of Vietnam's 26 species of (regionally widely distributed, and familiar) ducks and geese need be depicted and described, but a great many scarce forest birds and other landbirds are fully covered: these include no fewer than 22 of Vietnam's 26 endemic or near-endemic species, and 16 of its 41 laughingthrushes and allies (Fam. *Leiothrichidae*), among others, for example.

This very attractive guide to the birds of Vietnam will surely appeal, like other books in the *Naturalist's Guide* series, to the layman, traveler or other casual buyer. But the high quality of its photographic content, and the concise but informative texts on Distribution, Habitats and Habits, and Conservation Status are very useful for the ornithological specialist, too. I was particularly taken with the photograph of the endemic Grey-crowned

Crocias Crocias langbianensis. The descriptive text for the endemic Vietnamese *Cutia*, *Cutia legalleni*, depicted in the book, is careful to mention how it is distinguished from the similar Himalayan *Cutia C. nipalensis*, also present in Vietnam, though not otherwise covered.

Introductory chapters place the Vietnamese avifauna in context, describe the country's geography and climate, its range of habitats, and major birdwatching localities. The species accounts which occupy the main body of the book are followed by an apparently complete checklist of all birds recorded in Vietnam at time of writing. The species-order and taxonomy follow that used in BirdLife International's digital checklist of birds of the world Vol. 9. This sequence, which lists pigeons (Fam. Columbidae) preceding families such as Frogmouths, Nightjars, and Cuckoos, may be less familiar to readers than is the IOC World Bird List. However, both listings may now be superseded by the newly appeared (2025) Avilist with its single current consensus taxonomy for the world's birds.

The species texts and the concluding country summary checklist were not entirely concordant. The taxon listed as Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* in the species text is more correctly listed as White-faced Jay *G. leucotis* in the checklist. There is also something of a "cop-out" when it comes to the listing of what are colloquially known as LWHG—"large, white-headed gulls" in the checklist. The gull taxa that visit Vietnam in the palearctic winter may be not fully known but it is highly unlikely that any true Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus*, as listed, occur. Further, the bold text highlighting family names was missed in a couple of places: for Charadriidae and Vangidae. But these are minor quibbles in what is overall, a very useful and well-produced book.

Philip D. Round

Department of Biology
Faculty of Science, Mahidol University
Rama 6 Road, Bangkok 10400, Thailand