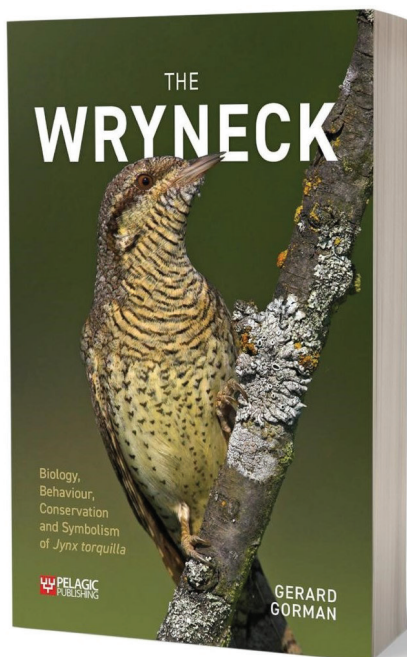


## Book reviews

Publishers and Authors are invited to submit a copy of their books for a review in the journal. Books are to be sent to the Deputy Editor-in-chief of Avocetta (Dr. Michelangelo Morganti - CNR-IRSA Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Istituto di ricerca sulle acque - Via del Mulino 19, 20861 Brugherio - MB)

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### A quite bizarre woodpecker: the first monograph on the Eurasian Wryneck



Woodpeckers present an outstanding suite of adaptations which enables them to live a life deeply connected to woodlands. This uniqueness was recognised when Charles Darwin took woodpeckers as an example to illustrate the evolutionary origin of adaptation in *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Today these characteristic birds continue to be celebrated in the books by Gerard Gorman who has been studying woodpeckers of the Picidae family for years. In his latest work published in 2022, Gorman shifts his

focus to one member of the family who stands out from the rest of the group because of its differences - the Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* – writing the first monograph on the species entitled “The Wryneck, biology, behaviour, conservation and symbolism of *Jynx torquilla*”.

Gorman skilfully writes a book based on an extensive scientific bibliography and enriches it with personal observations coming from his experience and long time spent observing the species in the field. As a result of this combination, the book is enjoyable to read and understandable by a very wide audience such as professional ornithologists, birdwatchers as well as less experienced readers who are approaching for the first time the wonderful world of woodpeckers.

The book consists of 16 chapters (208 pages) embellished with photographs that depict the habitats in which it nests and forages and that portray peculiar aspects of Wryneck behaviour such as the amazing “neck-twisting and head-turning”, or details of its plumage, vocalisation, and anatomy. The structure of the chapters guides the reader towards a progressive discovery of this unusual woodpecker, starting with the origin, taxonomy, anatomy and moult, followed by the description of the distribution and the numerous ecological and behavioural aspects known so far. The reader’s attention is constantly stimulated by the frequent comparisons the author makes with other members of the Picidae family highlighting differences and similarities. To provide a complete view of the genus *Jynx*, one

chapter is dedicated to the only other relative, the Red-Throated Wryneck, *Jynx ruficollis*, with whom the Eurasian Wryneck overlaps in sub-Saharan Africa during the non-breeding season. Finally, the book closes with a chapter in which the author tells us about the distant and manifold links between the Wryneck and folklore of various cultures, some of which have ascribed esoteric roles and powers to this bird due to its bizarre movements and sounds, and gave birth to myths and legends. Finally, the price is affordable and the paperback is light, compact and easily transportable.

**Letizia Campioni**

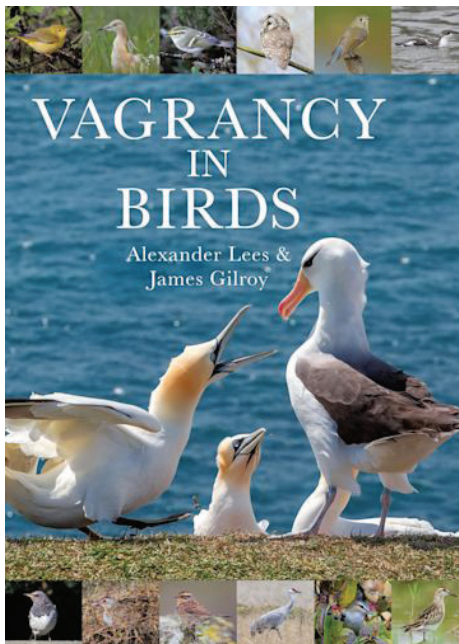
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#### Reference

**Gorman G., 2022.** The Wryneck, biology, behaviour, conservation and symbolism of *Jynx torquilla*. Pelagic publishing, Exeter, UK. 202 pp. 24.99 £

### Blowing in the wind: insights into the life of vagrant birds



Vagrants, cross and delight of so many birdwatchers around the world. Every time a feathered traveller finds itself lost on a lonely island, on the outskirts of a busy city, or perhaps in a field in the middle of nowhere, thousands of km far away from home, a crowd of birders grab their binoculars and come, no matter how long the trip will be. For some, a quick glance and a tick in the checklist are enough. Others spend most of their time looking at every distant silhouette, listening to every feeble call in search of the sighting of a lifetime.

But how many of us find a minute to wonder how this particular individual came to be displaced from its range, while we admire the details of its plumage or we wait for the ideal light for a photo? Was it a gust of wind or maybe an instant of confusion during the flight? Far from being a marginal circumstance, vagrancy is the result of the mechanisms of migration, and could even lead to unsuspected consequences on populations and ecosystems. “Vagrancy in Birds” illustrates this intriguing phenomenon from the perspective of a bird.

A long introduction takes us into the world of bird migration. Reviewing literature from the origin of migration research to the most up-to-date studies, it provides a striking summary of how orientation and internal clocks work (and how they can fail) and outlines the complex patterns of wind streams that birds have to cope with as they roam the sky. From mirror-image misorientation to extreme weather spells, from overshooting to ship-assisted journeys, from nomadism to exploratory movements, all the possible reasons for vagrancy are thoroughly explored.

The second part of the volume presents an overview of the propensity to travel off the “right” routes across the whole avian tree of life. If it is not surprising to find out that waders are much more prone to wander the world than ostriches, we can still be impressed by the long section dedicated to the dumpy pheasants and grouse, or by the fact that remote islands are sometimes inhabited by highly sedentary bird groups, and vagrancy is a good candidate to explain

some of these distribution patterns. Family accounts, which make up most of the volume, detail the range and movements of a vast sample of species, along with vagrancy records, and the hypotheses on the underpinning causes. Nice photos and exhaustive captions enrich the book throughout the text.

“Vagrancy in birds” is not only for twitchers. It is a must-have on the shelves of all people thrilled by the enigma, still not fully solved, of bird migrations.

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### Reference

**Lees A. & Gilroy J., 2022.** Vagrancy in Birds. Bloomsbury Publishing. 400 pp. 40.00 £

## The Birds of Italy 3



The third volume of *Birds of Italy* is the closing chapter of a huge effort to review and synthesize the knowledge on the birds of our Country. This colossal work was in fact started by Pierandrea Brichetti and Giancarlo Fracasso in 2003 when they published the first of nine volumes of *Ornitologia Italiana*. With *Birds of Italy*, the authors embarked on an even more worthy venture: to make our collective knowledge accessible to an international readership, by designing a synthetic and updated series of three volumes fully written in English.

This third volume, which follows the style and the structure of the previous two, spans from the Cisticolidae to the Icteridae families according to the IOC World Bird List (Gill F., Donsker D. & Rasmussen P. (Eds.) 2021. IOC world bird list. IOC) and is updated to 2019. Overall, 249 species are presented. For regular ones, synthetic —though meticulous— data on distribution, habitat, population size and density, trend, breeding calendar, movements, and wintering are given. For vagrants, each accepted occurrence record is listed, providing an important baseline to understand the occurrence patterns of rare species in Italy.

The book is completed by rich iconography, including very detailed and updated distribution maps of most species, a remarkable number of graphs that illustrate phenology and trends, and a closing section with high-quality colour photographs of the regular species of the Italian fauna.

The volume is further enriched by three opening chapters written by specialists on the Country's geography, bioclimate, and vegetation, a brief history of ornithology in Italy, and an interesting review of the Italian bird fossil record. A rich reference list closes the volume; this, along with the in-text references, will be a formidable heritage for the next generations of Italian ornithologists. However, not only standard literature was scrutinized here, but also a wealth of grey literature products and unpublished records, often originating from the plethora of online databases and platforms that are having the undoubted merit to collect a huge and increasing

amount of ornithological records, but often at the expense of their trackability.

This volume, along with the two previous ones, is an exquisite distillate of faunistic science, a matter often neglected and relegated to amateurs, which however is the baseline of any other taxonomical, biogeographical, and ecological research. The international ornithological community should be grateful to the authors who worked more than 20 years to produce this invaluable review and hope this effort will continue in the years to come.

**Giacomo Assandri**

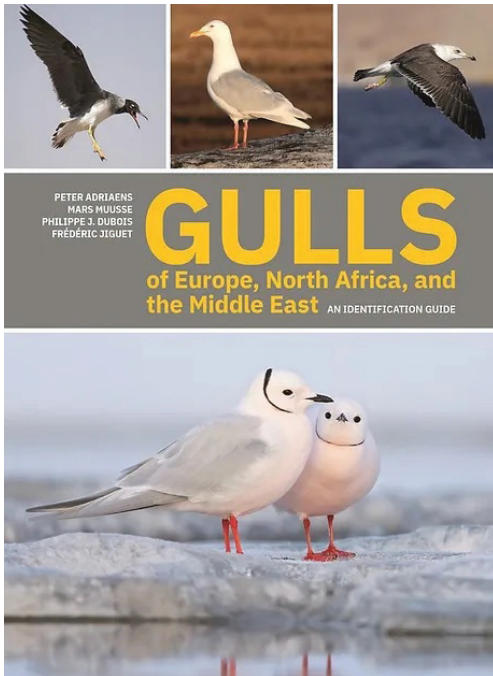
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#### Reference

**Brichetti P. & Fracasso G., 2022.** The Birds of Italy. Volume 3. Cisticolidae-Icteridae. Edizioni Belvedere, Latina (Italy), "historia naturae" (10), pp. 436. 45€.

#### For Gull lovers: a photographic Guide to Gulls of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East



For a birder who operates in the Western Palearctic, gulls are among the trickiest birds to identify. However, most of us love challenges and these long-living wanderers, with their variability across age groups and their ability to suddenly appear to brighten up a boring winter day, have all the features to melt our hearts.

In the last years, a handful of guides came out in an attempt to meet the increasing interest raised by this fascinating group. Thus, "Gulls of Europe, North Africa and Middle East: An Identification Guide" is not the very first book to address this topic, but is certainly the most up-to-date one for this region and, in my opinion, also the easiest and most enjoyable to browse. Weird to say, its main strength lies in the choice of using photos instead of drawings. Indeed, these are better suited to illustrate how plumage worn over time, and which features could be seen in every static or dynamic real-life pose.

Identification is based on ageing and moult, which are the first, fundamental steps for anyone who wants to get involved with gulls. Species are split according to size, which in turn determines how long they take to reach the definitive plumage. For medium and large gulls, up to five "cycles" are thoroughly explained in the introduction, along with some specific cases and exceptions.

Species accounts are organized as follows: first, a short description of the general structure, including size, proportions, and jizz; then the different cycles, starting from adults, each one stretching over one or more pages. "Similar taxa" boxes provide comparisons with other species, pointing out, for each age class, the essential elements to look at when it comes to deciding between two or more species. A very useful tool. Finally, the range and vagrancy occurrences are described in detail, also introducing any changes which have taken place in the last decades.

With 45 illustrated species and subspecies and nearly 1400 images, this superb book looks like one of the most complete guides on this topic and cannot be missed by Gull experts. Moreover, thanks to its innovative approach, it could be appreciated also

by the many beginners who are a little intimidated and confused by those big plates which have become a tradition among identification guides. Last but not least, its surprisingly small size and low weight, thanks to the paperback cover, make it easier to take it to the field. A little gem!

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### **Reference**

**Adriaens P., Muusse M., Dubois P.J. & Jiguet F. 2022.**  
Gulls of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East:  
An Identification Guide. Princeton University Press,  
Princeton and Oxford. 320 pp. 30.00 £