Complete bird checklist

Title
BirdLife International maintains its own complete checklist of birds (taxonomic checklist of the world's bird species) because there are so many different global, regional, national, site and family taxonomic checklists, and the current major phase of taxonomic revision requires BirdLife to track and evaluate new arrangements as they are proposed; thus there is an urgent and sustained need to resolve the taxonomic rank of many taxa. In undertaking this work, BirdLife does not pretend to be an authority on the taxonomic status of the world's birds (and indeed does not have the resources or aspiration to become this) but rather seeks to set a globally consistent taxonomic standard relevant to establishing conservation priorities through, for example, identifying globally threatened bird species, Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs) and Important Bird Areas (IBAs). BirdLife's guiding principles are:

- Application of the Biological Species Concept. BirdLife accepts that a considerable percentage of the global avifauna, notably in Asia, requires reassessment as a result of being 'over lumped', but does not adopt the Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC). This is partly because there is no agreed, standard world list based on the PSC and it may be many years before there will be one, and partly because BirdLife is unpersuaded by some of the underlying concepts and arguments.
- A relatively conservative approach. BirdLife aims for consistent global treatment through its adoption of selected taxonomic sources, association with various taxonomic processes and committees, and through its own review process, and therefore is unlikely to adopt radical new arrangements if these use criteria inconsistent with treatments elsewhere in the world.
- A pragmatic approach. BirdLife accepts that its checklist will never be fully internally consistent because of regional differences in taxonomic efforts, and also because of the time and resources necessary to achieve this. Therefore BirdLife prioritises its taxonomic work by focusing on those taxa or regions where important conservation implications exist.

BirdLife uses its taxonomic checklist of birds as the basis for much of its global, regional and national priority-setting work. However, some BirdLife Partners may also use other regional / national checklists and taxonomic sources that are particularly relevant in their context.

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The BirdLife complete checklist of birds is based on: 1. A small number of well-recognised and established taxonomic sources. These 'main' sources are periodically reviewed and, where appropriate, updated or revised (see table for the 2010 sources and 'References' below). In general, field guides are not included because of inadequate taxonomic justification. 2. Peer-reviewed papers describing taxonomic revisions, published subsequent to the main sources, and which have been reviewed and adopted by the BirdLife Taxonomic Working Group (see 'References' below). 3. Original taxonomic research conducted by BirdLife researchers and usually published in peer-reviewed papers or BirdLife's Red Data Books, notably concerning particularly controversial and complex taxa. 4. Some deviations from the adopted sources where treatment is judged to be mistaken, premature, inconsistent and/or controversial. 5. An attempt to combine these various sources and decisions in a globally consistent manner. The BirdLife Checklist includes information on the scientific and common names used by BirdLife, the Authority (for the original description of the taxon), BirdLife's taxonomic treatment (recognised, not recognised or under review), the latest IUCN Red List category (e.g. Extinct, Vulnerable, Least Concern), the (selected) sources that recognise the taxon, the scientific and common names used by these sources, where relevant, a taxonomic note, and a record ID number unique to the taxonomic entity. The BirdLife Checklist is a work in progress. Further updates and releases are planned on an annual basis. Click here to download BirdLife's Complete Bird Checklist. Image credit: Kanit Khanikul; www.rarebirdsyearbook.com