



Although based at the University of York, Colin Beale has spent a quarter of a century studying birds in East Africa. His entertaining book, *101 Curious Tales of East African Birds*, grew out of a series of tweets on #BirdsAtTea penned during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020. It uses 101 East African birds to convey fascinating insights into the biology and conservation of birds in general.

Structured as a series of double-page spreads, the book gives each bird its moment in the spotlight with a concise, engaging essay paired with one or two striking photographs. Beale professes in the brief introduction that there's 'no particular order to the species and topics covered', but he is being overly modest. Most stories follow a logical sequence in which he skilfully guides the reader on a journey that weaves adroitly through topics ranging from avian diversity and speciation through mating systems, mimicry

unlocking the secrets of East African birds

and learning to eco-physiology, sensory and foraging ecology, migration, breeding biology, global change and conservation.

That said, each essay can be read as a stand-alone piece, making it an excellent book to dip into when you have a few minutes to spare. Each essay focuses on one aspect of the biology of the species in question, often using it as an exemplar of a broader principle. The text is easy to read and engaging, but importantly the main source papers are cited and listed at the back of the book, so you can easily follow up should you want more information on a particular topic. Altogether, the stories cite 238 scientific studies.

The book lives up to its subtitle 'A brief introduction to tropical ornithology',

doing so in a way that is accessible to a wide readership. Although the focus is on East African birds, most of the species covered also occur in southern Africa, and even for those few that don't, the message of each of Beale's essays can also be applied to southern African species. Anyone interested in birds is bound to find a wealth of novel insights that will help them to better appreciate their remarkable diversity.

PETER RYAN

101 Curious Tales of East African Birds can be ordered from Pelagic Publishing pelagicpublishing.com. It costs £25; extra fees apply for delivery outside the UK and North America.

