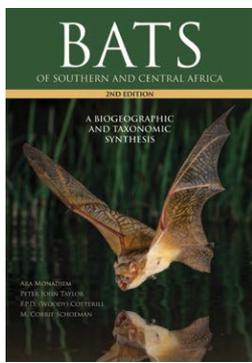


Books

Batty about bats

Two new books on bats have been published in South Africa recently, but they couldn't be more different in their format, approach and level of detail.

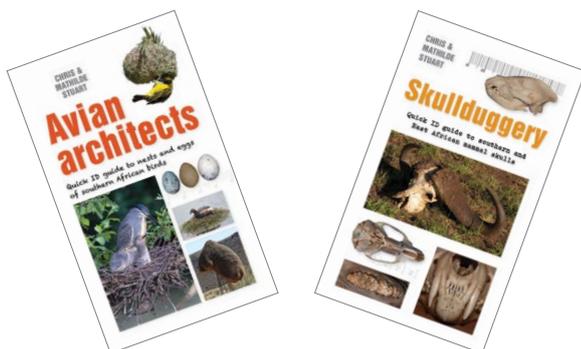
At one extreme is *Bats of Southern and Central Africa*, published by Wits University Press. This is a revised edition of a book first published in 2010, and includes an additional eight newly described species to supplement the original 116 species accounts. It's a hefty tome of 640 pages, and the recommended retail price is a whopping R600.



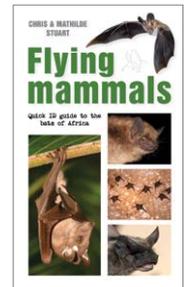
This hardcover book would clearly be a prized possession for bat specialists, but it would also appeal to other scientists and conservationists needing a comprehensive reference work on bats, as well as to serious amateur naturalists. Although not a 'coffee-table book', it does contain plenty of large, high-quality colour photographs, and the chapters on bat biology and ecology, biogeography and echolocation

provide an easy-to-digest introductory overview before the species accounts, which make up the bulk of the content. These include descriptions, measurements and diagnostic characters as well as detailed information about the distribution, habitat, roosting habits, foraging ecology and reproduction of each species. The updated species distribution maps are based on 6 100 recorded localities, while new spectrograms can help identify bats in acoustic surveys.

The authors – Ara Monadjem, Peter John Taylor, Fenton (Woody) Cotterill and M. Corrie Schoeman – are all based in southern Africa. The first two are zoology professors from the University of eSwatini and University of Venda, respectively. Woody Cotterill is a research fellow with the National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project, while Corrie Schoeman is an honorary associate professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.



At the other extreme of the publication scale is *Flying Mammals* by Chris and Mathilde Stuart. This is a very slim pocket guide in the 'Quick ID guide' series the authors have published under Penguin Random House South Africa's Struik Nature imprint. Although only 40 pages long, it is all that the average reader would need to identify a bat to family level, from the large fruit bats to the insectivorous horseshoe bats, leaf-nosed bats, slit-faced bats and others.



A short introduction provides information on bat evolution, flight, echolocation and reproduction, followed by useful photos of the skulls of 16 insectivorous and eight fruit-bat species. Then the bat families are covered in a few pages each, split into sections on description, diet and roosting, with a number of photos of different species. The closing pages touch on conservation and research, with a box on the impact that COVID-19 may have on these aspects, given that the disease likely originated in bats.

The authors are Struik Nature stalwarts, having written numerous field guides and pocket guides, mostly on mammals, for the publishers since the 1980s. The recommended retail price for this handy little book is R80.

The Stuarts have also produced two other offerings in Struik Nature's Quick ID series recently. *Avian architects* is a guide to nests and eggs of southern African birds. A key to the main nest types on the inside front cover directs the reader to the correct section. These types include, for example, mud-pellet nests, woven nests, holes in earth banks and self-excavated tree holes, as well as nests on cliffs, on water, on tree branches and on the ground. Of course, in its 40 pages the book can only provide an introduction to the topic and describe some nests and eggs most likely to be seen, but it is fascinating to see the variety of nests, and also the characteristics that distinguish very similar-looking eggs.

Anyone who has ever come across a skull in the veld will appreciate how useful *Skullduggery* would be to have at hand. It's a guide to mammal skulls, from the largest such as elephants, rhinos and hippos to the smallest rats, mice and shrews. It also covers marine examples that might be found on the beach – some whale, dolphin and seal skulls. An introductory section explains mammal dentition and dental formulas, which are provided for most groups featured in the book.

Previous Quick ID guides by the authors focus on animal tracks (*On Track*), droppings (*Scatalog*) and behaviour (*Behaviour Briefs*).