

# BINOCULARS

## Mid-range marvels



KOWA 8x42

The User's Guide to binoculars published in *Africa – Birds & Birding* at the end of 2006 (Vol. 11, no. 6, pages 59–63) proved extremely popular with readers, and its success prompted other manufacturers to submit their products for review. This article deals with two brands, Kowa and Lynx. Both produce good-quality binoculars at a reasonable price. Reviewer **Peter Ryan** assessed their comparative merits.

**K**owa is a Japanese company, best known among birders for its premium spotting scopes, which are up there with the best of them (see Vol. 12, no.6, pages 55–59). But it

also makes good birding binoculars. We were given two models to evaluate, one from Kowa's full-size, 42mm objective range (8x42) and one from their mid-size, 32mm range (10x32). Both come in 8x or 10x magnification.

The 8x42 Kowa binoculars are nicely balanced, waterproof roof-prisms, filled with dry nitrogen to discourage fungal growth on the lenses. The image is bright and sharp across the field of view, and my only complaint optically was a very slight spherical aberration. The design is pleasing and they appear to be well constructed, but the plastic eyecups were a little loose on the review model. The individual eyepiece adjustment doesn't lock, but it is quite stiff and is unlikely to be moved accidentally. These binoculars come with a rain-guard, objective covers, a broad neoprene neck strap (which might be

a problem in hot, sticky climates) and a soft carrying-case. At around R5 500, they compete favourably with models twice or three times the price, offering exceptional value for money. The 10x42 retails for only a few hundred rands more, and would also be well worth a look.

The 10x32 Kowa is similar to its larger cousin, but has a slightly different design. The smaller objective lens and higher magnification result in a smaller field of view and slightly impaired performance in poor light, but the image quality is excellent under most conditions. The main drawback was slightly more marked spherical aberration. Bizarrely, the pamphlet in the box advised that 'the unit is not airtight and should not be held under running water', but this appears to be an

error, as all the promotional literature confirms that they are waterproof and filled with nitrogen, just like the larger model. Again, these offer great value at only R4 600.

Kowa also makes compact binoculars (8x25 and 10x25) and has a large, premium range (8.5x44 and 10.5x44) using their high-quality Prominar lenses. The latter are rather large and almost a third heavier than the 42mm model reviewed here. We weren't offered one to assess, and it would be interesting to see how much better the optics are. However, for most birders, I doubt they would warrant the marked increase in price (roughly R10 000 more than the equivalent 42mm model). All Kowa binoculars come with a lifetime warranty.

**L**ynx is a South African company that has binoculars made under contract in Japan for distribution in southern Africa and Australasia. The company offers a wide range of models, from compact and porro-prism to roof-prism. We had five models to review. The compact 8x24 binoculars are not really suitable for serious birding, but they have surprisingly good optics, and their field of view isn't too bad, despite the small objective lenses. They are also fully sealed and nitrogen-filled and, for their price, are attractive as a backup pair or for long hikes where weight is an issue. They also come in a 10x28 model, with the same field of view.

All the other Lynx models offered for review were conventional roof-prism binoculars. Optically, they are excellent,

delivering crisp, bright images and, for the most part, the design and construction quality is on a par with mid-range models. They are nitrogen-filled, waterproof and have an anti-fogging coating on the outside of the lenses to prevent condensation when the binoculars are cold. Like the Kowas, the individual eyepiece adjustment doesn't lock, but is quite stiff and unlikely to be moved inadvertently. The screw-out eyepieces on some models were rather loose, but I was assured that this fault had been rectified in the new models.

The pick of the crop was the 44-series 8x32, which has a nice, compact design and offers amazingly close focus. For its



LYNX 44 8x32

price, it offers the best value for money I have seen locally. By comparison, the 44-series 10x50 was handicapped by a rather poor close focus. The 45-series midi-roof-prism is even more compact than the 8x32 model, but I found the location of the focus wheel a little uncomfortable to use. The 50-series 8x42 is similar to the Nikon Monarch, which until now had been my model of choice for an entry-level roof-prism. It does offer some additional features, such as the anti-fogging coating, which accounts for its higher price.

Interestingly, both Kowa and Lynx roof-prism binoculars focus the 'wrong' way, relative to the models I am accustomed to using, but one soon adapts to this difference. Overall, the Kowa 8x42 is an excellent mid-level pair of binoculars, and the Lynx 8x32 is the best entry-level model reviewed by this magazine to date. □



LYNX 50 8x42



KOWA 10x32

MODEL	OPTICS	FEEL	VALUE	COST (R)*	MASS (g)	TYPE	CLOSEST FOCUS (m)	WATER-PROOF	RAIN-GUARD	OBJ COVER
Kowa 8x42	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	5 470	600	R	2.2	Y	Y	Y
Kowa 10x32	★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	4 600	760	R	1.6	Y	Y	Y
Lynx 44 8x32	★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	2 750	560	R	1.5	Y	Y	Y
Lynx 44 10x50	★★★★	★★★☆☆	★★★★	4 100	770	R	3.5	Y	Y	Y
Lynx 45 10x32	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★☆	3 350	480	R	1.2	Y	N	N
Lynx 50 8x42	★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	4 100	680	R	2.0	Y	N	N
Lynx 22 8x24	★★★	★★★☆☆	★★★★	1 880	240	COM	2.6	Y	N	N

R – Roof-prism  
COM – Compact

\*The prices shown in this table are the recommended retail prices (including VAT) and were correct as at the end of December 2007. They are intended as a guide only and we cannot take into account import currency fluctuations and retail price increases.