

PREFACE

Early in 1976, George J. Divoky, then chairman of the Pacific Seabird Group, reported that the governing committee of the PSG had decided to sponsor a symposium on shorebirds at its next annual meeting, in January 1977. He invited me to organize it. I welcomed the opportunity for several reasons. First, I had attended the PSG's second annual meeting in December 1975 and found the program and its attendants to be a good mix of interests in research on marine birds. Attendance by representatives from federal and state agencies, both active field workers and administrators, was better than at most ornithological meetings. Moreover, the membership as a whole evinced a sense of mission with regard to environmental welfare of marine birds, reflecting the ongoing and prospective research on their ecology and conservation sponsored by government agencies. All this boded well for a program on shorebirds that would direct attention to matters of habitat critical for shorebirds as well as their basic biology.

Second, in the prior 20 years or so, research on basic ecology and behavior of shorebirds had advanced more rapidly on their breeding grounds than on migratory and wintering grounds, and some balancing of attention was clearly in order. This need was made all the more conspicuous by the simple fact that shorebirds spend 9–11 months on the latter, only 1–3 months on the former. A symposium reflecting current research interests on their nonbreeding areas could help to improve the balance.

Third, in view of the expanding front of research on shorebirds on the two sides of the north Atlantic, especially their migration patterns and winter habitat use, the time was clearly opportune for a review of parallel needs along the Pacific Coast. The western European community is well ahead for several reasons—its relatively compact geography, the numbers of active field observers, the magnitude of their “ringing” programs, and the tradition of winter-season travel by ornithologists to southern Europe and Africa. By 1970, the surge of interest in shorebirds in Great Britain led to the organization of a Wader Study Group, with its own bulletin (no. 22 issued in August 1978). Along the Pacific Coast, by comparison, informational and manpower resources for research on shorebirds are limited, and to date, both geography (bear in mind distances on our long, linear coast) and politics appear to discourage the sort of international collaboration needed to address problems of habitat needs and migration patterns of shorebirds. Still, the Pacific Coast is not without some bright spots of accomplishments: The California Shorebirds Study, a cooperative program initiated with concern for preservation of wetland habitats and concluded in 1973 with a 275-page report, represents the only systematic and intensive use of shorebirds as indicators yet undertaken in the New World (see papers by Jurek and Speth). The Offshore Continental Shelf Environmental Assessment Program in Alaska, initiated in 1975 and for which the Bureau of Land Management is primary sponsor, represents a massive effort to provide baseline data and to assess prospective impact of coastal developments on biota generally, including shorebirds. A volcanic rush of new information is forthcoming. Questions of focus and follow-up for all this work remain, in California, Alaska, and elsewhere. It seemed clear that a symposium could help to bring all these matters into better perspective for both field workers and government agencies.

Accordingly, I sought papers on various aspects of shorebird biology and habitat conservation, which the contents of this volume illustrate well. By late summer, 1976, the developing program for the symposium spilled over the single day initially planned, and an extra half day was added. Time would not have allowed more papers than the contents of this volume. Yet initially, I did hope that more papers would result from my solicitations to Latin American workers and to representatives of government agencies responsible for coastal habitats in Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska, but my success in these two respects was only modest.

With regard to Latin America, survey work of the sort illustrated by papers of Hughes (Perú) and of Smith and Stiles (Costa Rica) badly needs doing in other sectors of the Pacific Coast. Existing distributional information is still relatively rough, and data for a picture of relative abundance in species such as the Sanderling with immensely broad latitudinal distribution are scant or non-existent. Further, it appears that some discontinuities in coastal occurrence may reflect migratory landfalls or staging areas after or before long distance flights. A possible example is the Knot. It is important to try to identify these critical coastal sectors. Still further, more primary work as well as a summary for the occurrence of nonbreeders during the boreal summer are needed for tropical and austral coasts. The paper by Johnson for nonbreeders on a Pacific atoll suggests problems of interest beyond mere distribution. A coordinated program for year-round censusing of selected sectors spaced along the Pacific Coast from San Diego to Tierra del Fuego would serve as an essential foundation for more sophisticated work on shorebird biology as well as on assessment and conservation of coastal habitats.

With regard to the North American coast north of California, the greatest amount of work is of course going on in Alaska, illustrated here by four papers. I had hoped to get a more general paper reviewing problems of coastal habitat classification and preservation as seen in these critical times for that state. This seemed like a reasonable hope considering the years and vast numbers of man-hours spent, by both federal and state agencies, in field work and in the yo-yoing of small planes in reconnaissance work along all sectors of the coast. But I failed. It appeared that in Alaska, in 1976, the multi-level political stir brought on by the whole bag of oil-related problems, with cumbersome bureaucracies facing conditions changing at a dismaying pace, was such that no one would or could face the job of broad synthesis about coastal habitats from the shorebird standpoint, even though the basic information exists. Perhaps this symposium will help to focus on a need whose importance is clearly and strongly suggested by papers here of Senner, Isleib, and Gill and Jorgensen.

Finally, and more generally, the PSG's shorebird symposium, like other symposia focusing on particular problems, taxa, and geographies, should help to improve the direction and pace of research in an area of active interest. Various results reported here call for additional work of potential significance at both basic and applicational levels, for example, the phenomena of site tenacity (Kelly and Cogswell) and dependence of wintering shorebirds on mosaic patterns of habitats (Page et al., and Gerstenberg). Also summaries of work on the British front by Prater and Goss-Custard help to chart directions for future work on the Pacific Coast. The reader will discern more than is mentioned here, and will judge all. The fact that remains is that the continuing interplay between basic studies

of shorebird biology and their use in coastal wetland assessment and conservation should keep the front of research moving significantly.

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