

## REVIEWS

BOYD, H. & PIROT, J.-Y. (Eds.). 1989. *FLYWAYS AND RESERVE NETWORKS FOR WATER BIRDS*. IWRB Special Publ. No. 9. 109pp. Available from IWRB, Slimbridge, Glos. GL2 7BX, UK, price £10.00.

*Flyways and reserve networks for shorebirds* is a collection of six reports on the status of waterbird populations from a workshop on this topic at the Third Meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, Regina, Canada, held in May 1987 (see *WSG Bulletin* 51: 10-14). In addition to the reports, the publication contains the Recommendations of the Conference and summary reports from the other three workshops. Three of the six main reports focus on the Old World and three on the New World. Five of the six comprise 6-12 page synopses of information often available at greater length elsewhere, together with appropriate conclusions regarding population sizes. The sixth, however, is almost as long as the other five together, as Cor Smit and Theunis Piersma have used the publication to provide a major review of "Numbers, midwinter distribution, and migration of wader populations using the East Atlantic flyway".

On the East Asian/Australasian waterbird flyway, reliable population estimates are difficult to come by except for some rare species and for waders wintering in southern Australia. Nevertheless Duncan Parish indicates that most population changes in recent years have been downwards, in line with the large-scale habitat alteration that has occurred. Jean-Yves Pirot and his co-authors summarise information on Western Palearctic wildfowl, and include two large tables showing previous and new estimated numbers of each species. Populations of most appear to have risen, but this is often only because of improved counting coverage. No attempt is made to place confidence limits on these population estimates so it is difficult to make any objective assessment of the "probable population trends" suggested by the authors. Indeed the authors themselves apparently became confused, as an erratum sheet is enclosed altering several assessments. This confidence limit problem is certainly not peculiar to this study and is one that is only just beginning to receive the attention it requires from waterfowl biologists.

James Bartonek provides a similar summary paper to that of Pirot *et al.* but for waterfowl populations in North America. Most goose populations are increasing, but a number of duck populations are well down on their 1970s numbers. The use of explicit "population index goals" is a concept worth greater consideration in the Old World. Hugh Boyd elaborates on Bartonek's presentation by using some of his data together with information from other sources to assess Canadian wetlands of importance for breeding waterfowl. Large-scale dam building and agricultural change are clearly proving major problems for the long-term maintenance of some Canadian wetland areas. In response to this the conservation emphasis is on changing land use practices rather than on acquiring and managing a few high quality wetlands. Guy Morrison and Pete Myers overview the shorebird flyway systems of the New World but, except for data derived from

Morrison & Ross' *magnum opus* on South American shorebird distribution (to be reviewed in a future *Bulletin*. Ed.), do not provide systematic quantitative information. With some limited re-ordering their paper is the same as that which appeared previously under a slightly different title in *Wader Study Group Bull.* 49, *Suppl./IWRB Special Publ.* 7: 57-69. The purpose of such double publication is hard to fathom and not to be encouraged.

Finally, what of the major contribution from Smit and Piersma? This is an ambitious and worthy paper which provides a solid benchmark for future work, but could nevertheless have been improved by a much stronger editorial hand. Confusion throughout in the use of the terms "criteria" and "qualifying levels" is not new but should nevertheless have been corrected here, as should errors such as the muddling of the English/Welsh and Scottish Dee estuaries (Figure 4). Assessment of population changes solely in relation to the original publication of Prater (1976) unnecessarily neglects intervening developments and the relevant, if obscurely titled, paper by Prater (1981. *IWRB Bull.* 47: 74-78) not even being referenced. Much information on the importance of "sites" for species is presented, but discussion is lacking as to how sites should be best defined: some British sites are merged without explanation and most African sites appear to be defined by political boundaries. The revision of 1% qualifying levels for wintering populations provides the core of the paper and is well documented, allowing others to assess for themselves the conclusions presented. The severe problems of assessing site importance during passage periods certainly deserves its airing, but the section preceding this on moult and migration is unnecessarily discursive in an already long paper. Overall the paper must have been a considerable undertaking and one which should be much referred to in the future.

Robert Prys-Jones

DYMOND, J.N., FRASER, P.A., & GANTLETT, S.J.M. 1989. *RARE BIRDS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND*. T. & A.D. Poyser, Calton. numerous line drawings and figures, 366pp. ISBN 085661 053 4. Price £19.00.

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*, Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*, American Cliff Swallow *Hirundo pyrrhonota*, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*, Two-barred Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*, Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, Daurian Starling *Sturnus sturninus* - all of them mouth-watering delights for any self-respecting twitcher. Their occurrence in the British Isles together with those of another 300 or so rare species is meticulously documented in this, one of the latest offerings in the Poyser series of ornithological books.

The bulk of the book is devoted to accounts of the occurrence of individual species, mainly those which have at some time been considered by the *British Birds* Rarities Committee. The line drawings which head each account are, by and large, superb. For me they are a highlight of the book. About half were specially commissioned for the work and not only

beautifully illustrate the species, but presumably in many cases also the individual birds concerned.

A single sentence usually provides the only information on the world distribution of each species, and the four or five-line species descriptions seem redundant in this work: it is not an identification guide and, in any case, many readers of this book will already own and have pored over the wealth of detail in books such as *Shorebirds* (Hayman, P., Marchant, J. & Prater, A.J. 1986. Croom Helm, London & Sydney).

The information on occurrence largely covers the period 1958-1985 and is presented in three formats. Distribution is mapped on a county by county basis with separate maps given for each season of occurrence, usually spring and autumn. I would, however, have preferred this information to have been presented instead in the now standard 10 km square mapping format. I assume that the authors retained the older county approach to enable ready comparison with the now out-of-print Poyser volumes *Scarce Migrant Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock, J.T.R. 1974) and *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock, J.T.R. & Sharrock, E.M. 1976). Total numbers of occurrences are shown by year in histogram form, enabling easy recognition of long-term trends in records. Similarly, seasonal changes in records are graphically illustrated as histograms of weekly occurrences. All records are given in full for those species which have visited Britain's shores on 12 of fewer occasions. In addition, extreme rarities which have occurred outside the period 1958-85 are also covered. Examples include such up to date gems as the Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* in Kent and the Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca* on Fair Isle, both in autumn 1988.

Forty-one species of waders are covered, varying in rarity from the single occurrences of Semi-palmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* on the Scilly Isles, Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* on the Humber Estuary and Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta* at Teesmouth to

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*, White-rumped Sandpiper *C. fuscicollis* and Temminck's Stint *C. temminckii*, with 1,404, 262 and 1,714 occurrences respectively.

With few occurrences of many of the species covered long-term trends in occurrence are difficult to detect. In addition there has been a massive growth in the number of observers during the period, probably confounding what might otherwise be clear trends. This can be illustrated by the occurrence of the American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*. For this species there were only eight records prior to 1966, but the total had soared to 108 by 1985. Has there been a real increase in occurrence, or is it because birders now study golden plover flocks more intensively in the hope of finding such a vagrant? Were these birds overlooked in the past, and does it really matter anyway?

This brings me to my main criticism of the book: a lack of synthesis. After a long browse through the book I looked forward to an overview containing some account of the causes of vagrancy, dispersal, irruption, a generalised geography of rare bird occurrences, the major sources and sinks - what becomes of these vagrants - and some indication of the value of this data for the conservation of habitats regularly supporting vagrants or rare migrants. There is, however, no coverage of these general points. Were the data insufficient, or were the questions not asked? Perhaps the authors have reserved all for a companion volume. Surely a use must exist for this database of some 45,000 bird records?

Although this is a major gripe the book as it stands is a delight to browse through. It will no doubt help to while away the long dark winter nights in armchair twitching, until the spring arrives with its plethora of new records needing cataloguing ready for inclusion in the second (and hopefully revised) edition. I look forward to it.

Andy Brown

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