

REVIEWS

Lopez, A. & Mundkur, T. (eds.) 1998.
The Asian Waterfowl Census 1994-1996. Results of the Coordinated Waterbird Census and an Overview of the Status of Wetlands in Asia.
Wetlands International, Kuala Lumpur. 118 pp.
ISBN 983-9663-27-5.

This report summarises the results of the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC - part of Wetland International's International Waterfowl Census) for the three years 1994-96, and includes information from countries in Asia, from Pakistan eastwards. Twenty-one countries contributed to information in the report with a total of 1,994 sites counted at least once and 376 sites counted in all three years. An impressive total of at least 1,382 participants were involved in counting in 1994 although numbers appear to have fallen in later years. The bulk of the report is made up of data tables summarising the information for each country (species totals by year by country, and site totals by year but not by species). These are preceded by country overviews organised by region as follows:

South Asia

Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

Southeast Asia

Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao P.D.R., Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam

East Asia

P.R. of China, Hong Kong, Japan, R. of Korea, Taiwan

Australasia

Australia

A summary table identifies those wetlands holding more than 20,000 waterbirds whilst another summarises census data on globally threatened waterbirds (for waders these are Sociable Plover *Vanellus gregarius* (max. single year count = 215 in 1996), Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* (max. single year count = ten in 1994), Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola* (max. single year count = five in 1996), and Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus* (max. single year count = 312 in 1996).

The report is prefaced by high-level

statements of support for the AWC from the Bonn Convention and the Ramsar Convention. In his introduction, Delmar Blasco (the Secretary-General of the Ramsar Convention) recalls the Resolution passed by the 1996 Conference of Parties in Brisbane which called upon "Wetlands International to continue to develop the International Waterfowl Census and to enhance its global coverage as an important basis for the identification of Ramsar sites".

Following a recent uncertain period when the future of central co-ordination of the Asian Waterbird Census seemed in doubt, this report and its endorsement, is proof, if any were needed, of the great utility of such data. Delmar Blasco rightly looks to the greater involvement and development of national networks in the collection and analysis of census data. Yet this can only occur through the maintenance of strong international co-ordination to lead this process of developing national schemes, and to share common standards of data collection and management.

The current report is clearly an indication of positive commitment from Wetlands International - Asia Pacific to the AWC and they should be congratulated on their continuing support for the census. Clearly the current report has required major effort to produce (and all involved are to be congratulated). It will be worth all of the time and resources expended if it engenders greater on-the-ground enthusiasm and commitment to wetland conservation in the countries concerned. Finally, Delmar Blasco perceptively notes "information is only as good as its application". We all deserve to be daily reminded of this essential truth. There is little point in counting if we do not use the data collected.

One immediate use for the AWC data would be in the context of a project being developed amongst the Specialist Groups of Wetlands International to try to assess the current protection provided by designated Ramsar sites for globally threatened waterfowl. A further stage would be to identify and develop cases for the designation of new Ramsar sites which hold important numbers of globally threatened species.

For this analytical project, data such as those presented in this report will be essential. Keep counting!!

David A. Stroud

Van der Have, T.M., Bacetti, N., Keijl, G.O. & Zenatello, M. 1997.
Waterbirds in Kneiss, Tunisia.
February 1994. WWO Report - 54.

This WIWO report can be purchased by paying 25 Dutch guilders [Dfl] (plus a Dfl. 15.00 administration cost for each separate order) to postal giro account 2.666.009 or to ABN-AMRO bank account 57.02.16.613 of Stichting WIWO, Fetha 23, 3633 CT Vreeland, The Netherlands; or by sending cash or a Eurocheque (both free of administration costs) to the same address.

This is another impressive WIWO report approximately 140 pages long reporting on a five week expedition. The expedition had five aims and seems to have achieved all of these comprehensively. Indeed, it shows what can be achieved in this timescale. Detailed counts were taken of birds of the Kneiss area and compared with those of a previous count. Many species counts were extremely similar although there were considerable declines in fish-eating birds which were unexplained. Extensive ringing operations were carried out resulting in around 1,000 birds being ringed most of which were Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. The analysis of data collected shows just what can be achieved by using a combination of measurements and recoveries in a detailed analysis. Unfortunately, a few of the conclusions drawn are rather speculative. For instance, a high proportion of males that were caught amongst the Dunlin and it is assumed that this reflects that males winter further south than females. Almost any analysis of Dunlin comes up with an unequal sex ratio for an individual site, there being considerable sexual segregation. An analysis from one area is not enough to make broad generalisations. This is minor quibbling, however; if all reports were presented as clearly and in as detailed a way as this, our understanding of wader migration and wintering biology would be much further advanced.

Dunlin were the main target of this expedition in terms of the ringing studies, however reasonable samples of a range of other species were collected. Excellent data are given on the biometrics of each of these species, and will be of considerable value to anybody wanting to undertake comparative studies. All too often expeditions of this sort give rather little information that is usable on the non-target species. One of the most difficult aspects of this expedition was a search to try and find wintering Slender-billed Curlews *Numenius tenuirostris*. Thirty-one wetlands were visited without any success. The work that has been undertaken, however, has been explained clearly so that these negative results can hopefully in the future be compared with more positive results if there is an upturn in the population.

The last aim of this expedition was to look at resightings of colour-marked Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber*. This is an excellent example of added value from an expedition. Small amounts of time were spent regularly searching for colour ringed birds resulting in 90 resightings of birds marked in France and Spain. There is a clear analysis comparing these sightings with previous data which is of considerable value in understanding the use made of Tunisia during non-breeding seasons.

All-in-all this is an authoritative report which will be of considerable use to a wide variety of people interested in water birds in the Mediterranean.

Nigel A. Clark

Viksne, J. 1997. *The bird lake Engure. Jana Seta, Latvia. 109 pp. ISBN 9984 07 057 3.*

This is a fascinating and beautifully published account of the Engure lake in Latvia - a key Baltic wetland for migratory and breeding waterbirds of about 5,000 ha (of which about 1,000 ha is reedbed). It is Latvia's largest coastal lake with over 500 vascular plants, and is of major importance not only for staging waterfowl but also for breeding birds (185 species recorded nesting). The lake was designated as Latvia's first Ramsar site in 1995.

This volume, which has been published in English, French and Latvian editions with financial assistance from OMPO - Migratory Birds of the Western

Paleartic (an international organisation created within the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation - CIC) is a model account of an important wildlife site. It is illustrated with spectacular colour photographs and clear graphics throughout. It starts by outlining the geomorphological history of the lake, a shallow coastal lagoon formerly connected to the Baltic but now isolated by a bar formed about 4,000 years ago. It then summarises the historical and current land-uses and economic significance of the lake, before moving to consider the history of ornithological research and survey at the lake, past and current conservation status, and habitat management and predator control issues. There is an extensive description of the status of the main bird species occurring on the lake and chapters on the population ecology of breeding ducks, as well as the author's detailed studies of Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*.

Of particular significance to those with an interest in breeding waders in the Baltic are interpreted histograms presenting the results of monitoring at the site since 1958. There have been dramatic changes to breeding populations with significant declines in several waders. These changes have resulted from the loss of extensive, formerly grazed coastal meadows around the lake. Following the establishment of protective status for the lake in 1957, traditional cattle grazing and haymaking in these meadows ceased and the resulting habitat changes (principally development of rank grassland and reed-bed expansion) were to the detriment of breeding waders. The changes first affected breeding Dunlin, the last pair of which was recorded in 1963. Conditions deteriorated for other species progressively, with significant declines commencing in 1958 for Ruff, in 1977 for Redshank, and in 1978 for Lapwing. Although waders have been 'losers' as a result of these habitat changes, ducks have been 'winners'. The volume gives a clear outline of the current habitat management regime to maximise duck productivity at lake Engure.

The story of the lost coastal marshes seems to be a classic case of misguided conservation practice following from a failure to appreciate the rôle of traditional agriculture in maintaining and enhancing features of importance for wildlife. Hopefully we live in more enlightened times, since the

understanding and promotion of low-intensity farming as a necessary component of nature conservation continues to develop (e.g. Bignal & McCracken 1996; Pienkowski & Martin-Novella 1996). I would thoroughly recommend this attractive little book as "a good read". The photos are spectacular, and as well as the science outlined above, there are a store of fascinating historical anecdotes - such as the description of the great Amber-Rush of 1842! - together with illuminating stories of the ornithologists and others who have studied the lake and its wildlife. The author and publishers are to be congratulated.

David A. Stroud

References

Bignal, E.M. & McCracken, D.I. 1996. Low-intensity farming systems in the conservation of the countryside. *J. Appl. Ecol.* 33(3): 413-424.

Pienkowski, M.W. & Martin-Novella, C. 1996. Opportunities for the European Pastoralism Forum to influence European and Spanish thinking. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 80: 55-61.

Serrra, L., Magnani, A., Dall'Antonia, P. & Baccetti, N. 1997. Risultati dei censimenti degli uccelli acquatici svernanti in Italia, 1991-1995.

Biologia e Conservazione della Fauna 101: 1-312.

This carefully prepared report summarises the Italian mid-winter International Waterfowl Census results for the period 1991-1995. During that time, coverage progressively improved, from 120 sites counted in 1991 to 335 sites in 1995. In all, 483 sites were counted at least once in the five mid-winter periods. Total waterfowl numbers also increased as a consequence of better coverage, from 122,993 in 1991 to 859,151 in 1995.

The authors have put a huge amount of work into analysing the data collected and presenting it clearly in tables, figures and maps. The report covers 115 wetland birds (from divers to terns and includes data on three wetland raptors). A total of 32 wader species are covered. Each species is described with text (summarising features of distribution and abundance), tables (showing peak counts at main sites), and

dot-maps for each winter (showing distributions and between-year changes). Twelve species occurred in Italy in internationally important numbers at at least one site although these only included two waders -Dunlin *Calidris alpina* and Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*.

The report also summarises a major exercise undertaken in 1994 to 'redefine' count units into ecologically coherent sites. It was then necessary to re-organise all previous counts against these newly defined sites and in the process to assess data quality - rejecting some limited data. Of particular interest to me was a novel data presentation which aims to distinguish those species highly aggregated on a few sites only, from those more evenly spread over many wetlands (and thus perhaps benefiting more from wider-countryside conservation rather than site-protection). A complex but easily understood plot of cumulative numbers of birds on sites clearly identifies localised populations where 90% or more of the national population occurs on fewer than ten sites. I imagine that this will rapidly become the standard reference for anyone with even a fleeting interest in Italian wetlands and their waterbirds.

David A. Stroud

Also received

(these volumes may be reviewed in a future *Bulletin*)

Marin, G. & Schneider, E. (eds.) 1997. *Ecological restoration in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve/Romania. Babina and Cernovca Islands.* Institutul de Cercetare si Proiectare Delta Dunarii & WWF-Auen-Insitut. 120 pp.

Svazas, S. (ed.) 1998. *Proceedings of the OMPO International Meeting: reproduction and important habitats of migratory birds of the Western Palearctic.* *Acta Zoologica Lituania, Ornithologia* 8 (special issue). 216 pp.

Thorup, O. 1998. *Ynglefuglene på Tipperne 1928-1992.* *Dansk Orn. Forenings Tidsskrift* 92(1). 192 pp.

