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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest Africain

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Cameroon Mountain Francolin *F. camerunensis* by volcanic eruptions! Very few of the worldwide total of about 142 species (and no African ones) were considered "insufficiently known".

Of the 26 W African species, most are assessed as not requiring immediate conservation action (partly because they are fairly well-known, so surveys are not needed), but survey and management are recommended for three francolins and three guineafowl, surveys for two more francolins, and taxonomic clarification for two quail "species" in order to determine whether any taxa are threatened. However, the species texts (given for threatened species only) do not always agree with the same species' entries in the Conservation Assessment Table on action required!

The conservation action plan deals only with threatened species, and not with all of those: the only detailed projects recommended for W Africa are research on the status of Cameroon Mountain Francolin and White-breasted Guineafowl *Agelastes meleagrides*, although from the Conservation Assessment Table, one can discover other work that would be valuable.

This booklet is a useful summary of conservation status and a sound guide to what to do next. It is a bit pricey for its size, but serious field workers might get one free, judging from a statement on p. vi.

Alan Tye

Sahel — Sahel. A controversial vision. By R. Denève, 1995. Pp. viii + 63. IUCN, Gland. ISBN 2-8317-0271-2, paperback, £6.95.

This publication consists of two equal parts. In the first, the author analyses land use in the Sahel, and the main causes of land use problems there. In essence, he concludes that current food supply and land degradation problems have been caused by population increases beyond the land's natural carrying capacity and by unfavourable economic circumstances, and not (or hardly) by recent droughts. More nutrients are being removed in crops and animal products than are being deposited in dust and rainfall. In addition, large scale application of external inputs (in particular fertilizer) is prevented by a lack of funded demand, and thus of a good price, for farmers' products. This makes investing in maintaining land quality unattractive, and yields have fallen.

Farmers' principal responses have been: clearance of increasingly marginal land and a decrease in fallow land; clearance of low-lying land for out-of-season farming; extension of irrigation along rivers and around pools; development of sedentary livestock raising; and emigration. As a result, herders who graze their cattle in the northern Sahel during the wet season, have less dry season grazing available further south. This has led to serious conflicts between herders and farmers over access to land and to watering points at wetlands now used for post-rainy season cropping.

In the second part, Denève uses this analysis to explain why many development projects in the Sahel have met with little or no success. In an annex, suggestions are made for rural development aid.

Although the document is presented as a "controversial vision", I cannot but say that I largely agree about the causes of the agricultural crisis in the Sahel. Others have come to similar conclusions (e.g. Breman, H. 1991, *The Renewable Resources Base for Sahelian Developments: its Limits and Potentials.* CABO-DLO, Wageningen), although there is some difference of opinion as to the possible solutions. I do think that efficiency of use of resources could be increased to a limited extent, in spite of local farmers and herders having developed, over centuries, an intricately balanced system of exploitation: some processes escape the observation of the non-scientist and that is where agricultural research can make its contribution. On the other hand, given current economic developments, large scale use of fertilizer seems unlikely in the foreseeable future, however desirable such external inputs might be.

The effects on bird life of the land use changes concern three main habitats: fallow land, bush land, and wetlands. Fallow and bush land are widespread in the Sahel. Neither contains any restricted-range bird species. Conversion to cultivated fields can, however, affect residents and migrants, including species which may also be facing problems in their breeding ranges, *e.g.* Montagu's and Pallid Harriers *Circus pygargus* and *C. macrourus.*

The increased pressure on wetlands is perhaps of greater concern. As areas of high production potential, wetlands in the Sahel are already in demand by farmers, herders and fishermen. Coordinated management is often lacking, degradation is spreading, and wildlife is generally well down the local list of priorities, a long way behind food security. While the significance of areas like the inundation zone of the R. Niger is well known, small wetlands are, by their sheer weight of numbers, very important to waterbirds (*e.g.* Mullié & Brouwer 1994, pp.57-74 *in* P. Kristensen (ed.), *Atelier sur les Zones Humides du Niger.* IUCN, Niger). Unfortunately, projected climate changes and demographic developments all point to further increases in pressure on Sahelian wetlands of all sizes (Brouwer & Mullié 1996, pp. 215-239 *in* Watson, R.T., Zinyowera, M.C. & Moss, R.H. (eds), *Climate Change 1995.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge).

One hopes that international conservation organisations can assist governments, local populations and local NGOs, in devising ways to manage Sahelian wetlands sustainably for production, as well as for native vegetation and wildlife. A publication like Denève's can certainly help achieve that goal. It is well written and generally well argued, even if the addition of a few more references would have been useful. I recommend it to anyone with an interest in the Sahel, its people, land use and environmental problems.

Joost Brouwer