



**West African Ornithological Society
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
Africain**



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Reviews — Revues

Threatened Birds of the World, senior editors A.J. Stattersfield & D.R. Capper, 2000. 852 pp., numerous maps and colour illustrations. Birdlife International, Cambridge. ISBN 0-946888-39-6, hardback, £70. Available from Lynx Edicions, Passeig de Gràcia 12, Barcelona, Spain (www.hbw.com).

This is a magnificent review of all bird species assessed by Birdlife according to the IUCN 1994 red data book criteria, including all species considered extinct since 1500. I found it hugely interesting and despite its size looked at every page, seeking species with which I was familiar. However, since this is the first rigorous global assessment of threatened birds, some inconsistencies inevitably occur.

Some 12% of the world's avifauna is considered Threatened (Critically Endangered CR, Endangered EN or Vulnerable VU), a figure much less than those for plants (where a flora has been fully assessed), mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish. This difference may at least partly result from a non-rigorous application of certain of the IUCN criteria. This probably lies more with the category VU than others, and the 182 species listed as CR are probably a true representation of the world's most endangered bird species. However, the evaluation has been carried out at the (biological) species level, which results in many of the most endangered taxa being left out of the book completely.

Introductory sections discuss threats and trends, and show the global distribution of threatened species. The hotspots are all in the tropics, especially Indonesia, and the Upper Guinea to Cameroon region of W Africa ranks high. Most threatened species depend on forests. The major current threat appears to be habitat loss, but the major cause of recent extinctions has been introduced species. These introductory sections are exceptionally clearly written and presented, as one has come to expect of Birdlife publications. The species accounts are an excellent source of information on biology, populations, threats, and conservation action and needs. One quibble with the systematic section is that Family names are not included in the page headers.

The threat assessments themselves, for species with which I am familiar, seem mostly consistent in terms of matching the IUCN criteria, but not always, especially at lower levels (VU and Near-threatened NT). According to IUCN criteria, all single-small-island endemics match VU criterion D2 based on range and number of sub-populations, but not all receive this category. W African examples are Principe and São Tomé Speirops *Speirops leucophaeus* (NT) and *S. lugubris* (not included), whereas Fernando Po and Mt Cameroon Speirops *S. brunneus* and *S. melanocephalus*, and the single-island Golden White-eye *Cleptornis marchei*, all with similar ranges and ecology and no evidence of decline, receive VU. Some other species that are known or suspected to be suffering declines and have relatively small ranges, such as

some Upper Guinea or New Zealand species, are not included at all. In general it seems as though many species listed as NT should, according to the IUCN criteria, be listed as VU. Birdlife may have its own arguments for not strictly following the IUCN criteria, but if the latter are to be as far as possible comparable across taxonomic groups and different types of distribution, then the criteria should be followed to the letter by all evaluating authorities.

A short section near the end of the book lists some species as Least Concern (LC), although it is not clear how these were chosen. In theory, every non-threatened, non-NT species should be LC, unless it has not been evaluated (NE) or is listed as Data Deficient. In fact, it looks like many of the "LC" species should really be NT. The LC list as it stands suggests that all bird species not included in the book have not been evaluated, which is surely not the case. A simple species list of LC and/or NE species would have been better, instead of the brief descriptions for a few selected LC species.

Finally, a section at the end lists threatened and NT species by country, but disappointingly does not include the recently-extinct species. This would have been useful to show the progression of the process of extinction in different areas.

These criticisms do not in any way condemn the book. On the contrary, it is a timely and invaluable reference, and I hope that Birdlife will continue to find the money to permit regular revisions.

Alan Tye

The Birds of Angola, by W.R.J. Dean, 2000. 433 + x pp., colour habitat photos, a few maps. Checklist 18, British Ornithologists' Union, Tring. ISBN 0-907446-22-1, hardback, £50.

The latest BOU checklist takes up an honourable tradition: the avifauna of an African country that has been effectively closed to study for many years. The second Checklist, of Zanzibar and Pemba (1979, BOU, London), was based mainly on Pakenham's studies that he had carried out much earlier, since few ornithologists had visited the islands since independence. This Angola checklist is based almost entirely on collections, and observational data by the author and colleagues, up to the 1970s. Angola has since experienced almost continuous civil war, and most of the country is now a minefield. Even the study of collections is incomplete: those within Angola, including those of A.A. da Rosa Pinto, could not be studied, and one large collection in Lisbon was lost when the Bocage Museum caught fire in 1978.

The book therefore summarises older knowledge and is most useful as a synthesis and evaluation of already-published data. It will form an excellent resource for further study after the landmines have been cleared.