



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



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News & Letters — Nouvelles & Lettres

Meetings to set up a West African Bird Migration Network

Migrant birds that breed in Europe and winter in Africa are almost universally declining throughout Europe, in some cases by 80–90% over the last 30 years. Changing environmental conditions in African wintering or migration areas are suspected of being responsible but almost no research is being carried out in Africa to solve the problem.

Nineteen researchers met at the Vogelwarte Radolfzell on 6 May 2008 to discuss setting up a network to facilitate research on migrant birds in W Africa. The rationale for the network is the increasing concern for declining populations of migrants and changing conditions on migration or wintering grounds. Similar threats may be affecting intra-African migrants, yet there is almost no research within W Africa to identify the effects of changing conditions. Research is hampered by lack of capacity within many African countries. A research network that identifies, undertakes, promotes and coordinates research will help to address this problem. The Radolfzell meeting discussed the aim, structure and framework for activities of the potential network.

The primary aim is to investigate the role of environmental change in W Africa (initially, and across Africa eventually) on population limitation of migrant birds. This is to be achieved by facilitating research in Africa into how the distribution and density of migrant birds varies with environmental change. This aim will be addressed by the network acting as a centre for information about relevant research, by setting up a website, by regular meetings and by contacts via an e-mail list. Will Cresswell (St Andrews University) and Volker Salewski (Max-Planck-Institute of Ornithology) will act as coordinators for the first year. Actions will be to promote within W Africa:

- monitoring, using standardised protocols that the network will develop and a framework to link individual contributions into a coherent database;
- ringing, in cooperation with institutions like EURING and AFRING;
- coordinated stable isotope sampling to identify non-breeding areas;
- orientation experiments in the field to investigate time and directions of migrations;
- data management to facilitate sharing and dissemination of data;
- establishment of permanent field stations in a wide range of countries and habitats;
- greater awareness of the problems of anthropogenic effects on migrant birds.

The next meeting will take place during the Pan-African Ornithological Congress in South Africa in September 2008, where the aim will be to contact additional interested institutions and persons. It is hoped that the joint network will be officially launched then, with the cooperation of various African and European institutions.

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