



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



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Liste Commentée des Oiseaux de Mauritanie. By B. Lamarche, 1988. 164 pp. Etudes Sahariennes et Ouest-Africaines 1: numéro 4 et Spécial. Nouakchott and Paris. FFfr 150 (EC countries) FFfr 180 (elsewhere) from Mme Lamarche, 36 rue du Président Wilson, 78230 Le Pecq, France.

This is by far the most complete picture to date of the avifauna of Mauritania. Each species account includes the name in Latin, French and English and, for each subspecies recognized, an indication of whether it has been examined in the hand, a succinct summary of status including whether it is of palaearctic or afrotropical affinity, the months of arrival and departure of migrants, locations and habitats where observed at various seasons, and months and sites of breeding. The list is preceded by an introduction to geophysical features and climate (six pages of maps), a section on ornithological exploration of the country in which some 50 observers have taken part, and survey sections on systematics, migration (including the effects of weather) and breeding. Following the list is a discussion dealing with the influence of topography and vegetation on the bird life and the meeting of palaearctic and afrotropical populations. The exhaustive bibliography contains 179 references.

Lamarche shows that about 57% of half-degree squares of Mauritania have been ornithologically visited and 9% somewhat adequately explored, compared with the 20% and 4% respectively that I found in 1981 (*Malimbus* 3: 62-72). The great increase in number of species during his stay (from 405 in 1981 to 547 in 1988) is in large part due to his intensive coverage of the southern extremes, which extend below 15°S into Soudan savanna. One feels that further growth of the Mauritanian list will be slow!

However, this paper does not offer a balanced view of ornithological work done in the country. In the annotated list, brief mention is made of selected findings of other authors, but over two thirds of the text are devoted to information obtained by Lamarche alone. Even then, generalizations are given without reference to detailed evidence, and statistics presented without a description of the methodology used to gather and analyse data. For instance, months of arrival and departure of migrants are listed, but are these based on subjective impressions, counts of resting birds, or movements seen? By which means did he estimate that 500,000 Swallows *Hirundo rustica* passed in one day, and over what front? Does the statement that *Sylvietta brachyura* breeds from June to December mean that nesting was actually observed in each of these seven months? (Neither Gee, *Malimbus* 6: 31-66, nor myself, each of whom spent some four years in Mauritania, discovered a nest of the species.) Without access to a record of observations, it is unfortunately impossible to assess the objectivity of the findings. I hope that the methodology will be published and the detailed data made available publicly.

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