



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



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(in the original and best sense of the word) ornithologist who provides a series of snapshots of two years in his life. It deals with 13 African countries, of which seven fall within *Malimbus*'s area of coverage and which might give an intending visitor useful hints as well as food for thought. For instance, the chapter on Niger recounts adventures which will be only too familiar to anyone who has travelled long-distance by road in francophone West Africa: efficient, but only in comparison with the anglophone parts. More seriously, Wilson presents a perceptive analysis of the problems of desertification in the Sahel. All the chapters are enlivened by little snippets of information thrown in as asides; I didn't know that the Dead Sea Apple *Calotropis procera* (that familiar, spindly, grey, roadside weed of semi-arid regions) was used in Sudan to blind people in one eye so that slavers would reject them. Cameroon, Nigeria and Togo are crammed into one chapter, in which the Cameroon and Nigeria accounts concentrate on the behaviour of bureaucrats, the disorganization of urban Cameroon, the Fon of Bafut and the horrors of public transport, while Togo's bit reinforces the impression of the comparative efficiency and lack of fuss of francophone countries.

Ethiopia gets the most coverage: not surprising given the author's country of residence during the period covered. Of the countries dealt with which I know, the treatment is generally fair, except Wilson is unnecessarily hard on Tanzania, perhaps because he remembered it in better, earlier days and then returned at its nadir. This chapter contains several small errors which increase the level of criticism and rather spoil my enjoyment of it. There is a scattering of misprints throughout the book, the best being "the Mushophagidae - literally the banana-eaters". Yes, birds do feature, although only incidentally, and mostly Corvidae.

Throughout the book, one finds oneself comparing one's own experiences with those recounted and wondering whether one's own are more interesting or amusing and whether one could have written about them better. In producing this book, Wilson has done what many of us have, more or less seriously, considered doing ourselves. He is adept at summing up the character of a country and its people (indigenous and not) in a few words and through a few incidents. The book is written from the viewpoint of an expatriate, and Wilson's problem is that sometimes he is too perceptive; his direct analyses will offend some readers, who will consider him a smug neo-colonialist, without realising that he is simply seeing and telling the truth about Africa, and without seeing his subtle sympathy through the obvious criticism. But then, I doubt that he was writing for such people.

Alan Tye

Bird Census Techniques. By C.J. Bibby, N.D. Burgess & D.A. Hill, 1992. 257 + xvii pp. Academic Press, London. ISBN 0-12-095830-9. Hardback £19.50.

This book is intended to bring together the methodology for various bird census techniques, which is scattered throughout the literature and difficult of access. Chapters

include general considerations and sources of error, territory mapping, line transects, point counts, capture and marking, individual species counts, distribution studies and habitat mapping and sampling. Such a combination might sound dry and daunting. However, each topic is clearly explained and assumes little previous knowledge of census techniques or statistics. The text is well-endowed with examples, mostly in separate boxes, which add interest and reality to the theory. Some also amuse, such as the sketches of ornithologists at work (mostly clad in wellies and anorak, bearded and male - possibly a biased sample!). Inevitably, the emphasis is heavily on European and North American studies and to a certain extent reflects situations alien to West Africa, such as differences in habitat, species abundance and the coverage possible (e.g. in atlas recording), but there is still a great amount relevant to a tropical situation. Besides being a basic background source, this book is also a useful starting point for more detailed enquiries: subjects are well-referenced and there is a 10-page bibliography. Each chapter also ends with a useful summary. If you're going to count birds, this is worth a read.

Hilary Tye

Putting Biodiversity on the Map: Areas for Global Conservation. Bibby, N.J. Collar, M.J. Crosby, M.F. Heath, C. Imboden, T.H. Johnson, A.J. Long, A.J. Stattersfield & S.J. Thirgood, 1992. vi + 90 pp. International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge. ISBN 0-946888-24-8, paperback. £12.50 from ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, U.K.

A foreword by E.O. Wilson defines the problem with crystal clarity: life on earth is entering an extinction spasm which could be the greatest since the Cretaceous saw the end of the dinosaurs, 65 million years ago. It will be caused by habitat destruction by humans, who are at present destroying c. 2% of the remaining tropical forest each year, besides their effects on other habitats. This book is the first global attempt to identify the places (termed "endemic bird areas" or EBAs) which, if protected, would save the majority of bird species.

The book is profusely illustrated with maps, graphs and photographs. The presentation is clear, with a marginal running summary which I found at first irritating but soon learnt to ignore, but which may be of great use in bringing the message to politicians and others who will not look at more than ten words strung together.

One important point, often overlooked, is emphasized by the Introduction: biodiversity is a global concept and only has meaning as such. A local increase in diversity caused by converting primary forest to second-growth, which may add widespread, open-country species to the system, might contribute to a decrease in global biodiversity due to extinctions of endemics.

Why use birds as indicators of important places to protect? They are the only group of organisms to fulfil three pre-conditions for the analysis undertaken in the book: they