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

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Centres of Plant Diversity. A guide and strategy for their conservation. Vol. 1, Europe, Africa, South West Asia and the Middle East. Ed. by S.D. Davis, V.H. Heywood & A.C. Hamilton, 1994. xiv + 354 pp., *c.* 8 maps. World Wide Fund For Nature, Oxford. ISBN 2-8317-0197-X, hardback £30.

Concern about rapid loss and degradation of ecosystems prompted the compilation of the three-volume work of which this is the first part. It aims to highlight areas of prime botanical importance worldwide, as was done for birds by BirdLife's Endemic Bird Areas (C.J. Bibby *et al.* 1992, *Putting Biodiversity on the Map*, ICBP, Cambridge). The latter are cross-referenced in some accounts, where they coincide geographically; indeed, sites with high diversity and endemism in plants often have the same characteristics in their avifauna.

The general introduction may be of least interest to the ornithologist, but does contain some thought-provoking data; Congo, Gabon and Zaire each have over 1000 species of endemic vascular plants while Benin, Burkino Faso, The Gambia, Nigeria and Togo apparently have none! The long section on Africa includes about 40 West African sites which have been identified as centres of plant diversity and endemism. Fourteen of these are extensively described in "data sheet" format, which includes information on geography, geology, vegetation, flora, useful plants, social and environmental values, threats and conservation. The other 26 sites are outlined briefly within country sections, which also give a summary of the natural vegetation of each country. Centres of regional plant endemism are also discussed.

Overviews such as this are by their nature limited in depth of information but this volume would be a good starting point for more detailed research (being well referenced), or a book to dip into for non-ornithological background information about an area. Threats and conservation priorities seem broadly similar for plants and birds and it is hoped that identifying the most botanically rich areas in Africa will lend weight to the conservation of important bird habitats.

Hilary Tye

The Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands: environment, economy and sustainable development of a Sahelian floodplain wetland. Ed. by G.E. Hollis, W.M. Adams & M. Aminu-Kano, 1993. Pp. xviii + 244. IUCN, Gland. ISBN 2-8317-0107-4.

The Hadejia-Nguru wetlands form part of the floodplain of the Komadugu Yobe river basin in northeast Nigeria, within the Lake Chad Basin catchment. The wetlands are an area of confused drainage, where the Hadejia and Jama'are rivers meet lines of ancient sand dunes to form a complex pattern of permanently and seasonally flooded areas, and dry land. The wetlands have long been recognized for their internationally

important populations of Palaearctic and Afrotropical waterfowl and waders (10 species are each present in numbers exceeding 1% of the region's total), and has been ranked as the fifth most important site for Palaearctic migrant species in West Africa.

The floodplain is also home to about one million people, who variously carry out extensive wet-season rice farming, flood-recession agriculture and dry season agriculture; it supports fishing people who also farm, and is grazed in the dry season by substantial numbers of transhumant Fulani livestock, particularly cattle. In recent years, however, both the economic and conservation importance of the Hadejia-Nguru wetlands have been severely compromised by developments elsewhere in the river basin, especially by the building of dams and barrages upstream for irrigation. The resultant reduction in both the amount and seasonal pattern of flooding has exacerbated the effects of the Sahel drought, causing social disruption amongst the floodplain's peoples and threatening the area's value for wildlife.

In 1985, the wealth of the floodplain's bird life became the initial focus for the Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands Conservation Project, run jointly by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, IUCN, and the International Council for Bird Preservation (now BirdLife International). It was immediately clear, however, that the long-term conservation of the wetland and its resources would be best ensured by a proper understanding of the environmental and socio-economic changes that were occurring, in order that effective planning and management could be put in place.

The present volume is one of the products of that project. It is not about birds and contains only a few pages devoted to them and to the six (mostly unsuccessful) designated reserves within the wetland. Rather, the book provides a comprehensive summary in its first two main sections of the area's hydrology and its agricultural and fishing economy, followed by a third major section on development and conservation, especially the likely hydrological impact of water management and its consequences both for the local economy and for nature conservation. The book will nevertheless be of value to ornithologists with an interest in conservation in Nigeria or elsewhere in the semi-arid parts of West Africa, and to anyone anywhere interested in wetland ecology and management. As a case-study, it amply reinforces the message that to deal with environmental degradation and unsustainable resource use, development activities need to strengthen household economies within the context of an overall conservation policy that accommodates the needs of local people, so that sustainable management and the reservation of key areas for wildlife becomes an understandable option with local support.

Peter Jones