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

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Reviews — Revues

Stratégie Préliminaire pour le Suivi des Oiseaux d'Eau en Afrique. Ed. by T. Dodman, 1997. 175 pp. Publ. 43, Wetlands International, Wageningen. ISBN 1-900442-14-0.

This report is the proceedings of a workshop in Senegal in 1996 on the development of waterbird counts and conservation in Africa. The contributions of about 20 authors form a valuable compilation and evaluation of the research on numbers, distribution and ecology of Palaearctic and Afrotropical Anatidae, since the initial Sahel zone work done by Francis Roux and Guy Jarry from the mid-1950s and the coordinated censuses of Palaearctic waterfowl populations, initiated by Wetlands International (in its former guise as IWRB), in 1967.

An introductory chapter explains the lack of international strategy for research on wetland conservation on the African continent, and that increased coordination would improve the probability of achieving research and conservation goals. Chapter 2 reviews the work done on wildfowl counts and its implications for conservation. Research on Anatidae and Ardeidae is singled out as particularly important. Other chapters deal with the international politics of wildfowl conservation (Ramsar and Bonn conventions), and international programmes for monitoring trends in waterbirds in Africa, proposed or initiated by the French working group on migratory West Palaearctic birds (OMPO) and Office National de la Chasse, WIWO in the Netherlands, and BirdLife International. A further section deals with the organization of waterbird counts and their objectives, in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Niger and Senegal.

Ernst P.R. Poorter

Centres of Plant Diversity. Volume 1: Europe, Africa, South West Asia and the Middle East. Ed. By S.D. Davis, V.H. Heywood & A.C. Hamilton, 1994. 354 pp., several maps and photos. WWF and IUCN, Gland. ISBN 2-8317-0197-X, hardback, £30.

The important project of which this is the first of three volumes, parallels, for plants, the Endemic Bird Area analyses published by BirdLife International. It attempts to identify and highlight plant diversity and endemism hotspots around the world, taking into account not only numbers of species present in an area and number of endemics but also degree of threat (amount of habitat/site destroyed), gene pool of value to

man, diversity of habitats, and presence of specialist species. Most of the top continental sites have over 1000 vascular plant species and over 100 endemics. Island sites chosen have over 50 species or 10% of the flora endemic.

The introductory section describes the project itself, and summarises global patterns of diversity and endemism. Some of the arguments are a little tenuous due to shortage of data, such as the calculations of continental diversity and endemism on pp. 7–8; throughout the book the lack of data compared with what we have for birds is evident. Only 15% of the 234 top global sites are considered reasonably safe.

Sites are termed "sites" where the whole area needs to be conserved; "floristic province" or "vegetation type" is used for larger areas where a network of reserves is required. This distinction leads to much inconsistency and is perhaps not very useful in practice: some "sites" such as a montane area, could equally be protected by a reserve network, while floristic provinces and vegetation types would better be broken down into sites so that we can really see what needs to be protected. The choice of the top 234 sites that are given detailed "data-sheet" treatment is open to criticism. Some bias according to the authors' and editors' regional knowledge and specialisation is evident, and others of us may wonder why our favourite sites, that easily meet the stated criteria (such as São Tomé), are not included, while others that might seem less valuable (such as St Helena with only 60 species, although 50 are admittedly endemic) are. Why include East Usambara but not West Usambara nor others of the Eastern Arc chain of montane isolates? In Sierra Leone, why include Loma and Gola but not Western Area and Tingi? The approach also leads to some neglect of the conservation requirements of widespread but rare species, as recognized in the similar EBA process.

The list of the top 234 sites is excellent for lobbying purposes, and can usefully be combined with the EBA results, but it inevitably obscures the fact that, even if all 234 were fully protected, we could still lose a large proportion of plant diversity. This could only be preserved by protecting the "lesser" sites (including such gems as the Gulf of Guinea islands), which are seriously neglected by the chosen approach. Most of the famous African sites are mentioned in the regional table (Table 25) but only 30 of 84 are given data-sheet treatment. The others should have had more attention drawn to them, such as by mapping; as it is, the few (whole-continent) maps show only the data-sheet sites. More emphasis on the "lesser" sites would have made the book a much more useful conservation tool. It is also a pity that, even for the data-sheet sites, site maps are presented for very few; maps readily place a site in context and leave a more lasting impression, and maps for every site could have been a valuable feature.

The overview section on Africa is good, dealing with vegetation types, factors influencing them, flora and threats. The African protected area system is shown to give much poorer protection to plant species than to birds: the protected areas are mostly in savannas and neglect the forests.

In summary, although the book is marked by inconsistency in the basics of the approach, this does not destroy its value as a conservation planning tool and as a useful comparison with EBAs. Hopefully a future edition will be able to draw on better information, take a broader view and present a more complete and balanced picture. Most of the above criticism refers to shortcomings that are perhaps inevitable in a first review of a comparatively poorly known group of organisms (compared to birds, at any rate); the book is definitely worth acquiring by anyone concerned with comparative biogeography or conservation planning and will serve as a very useful basis for further research.

Alan Tye

Also received:

The Atlas of European Mammals. By A.J. Mitchell-Jones, G. Amori, W. Bogdanowicz, B. Kryštufek, P.J.H. Reijnders, F. Spitzenberger, M. Stubbe, J.B.M. Thissen, V. Vohralík & J. Zima, 1999. 484 pp., many maps. Academic Press, London. ISBN 0-85661-130-1, hardback, £37.50.

An excellent dot atlas based on 50 x 50 km cells, covering Europe except Russia, Byelorussia, Ukraine and Moldova, and dealing with all species found in Europe including introduced ones.

Alan Tye