

Reviews

AN ATLAS OF WADER POPULATIONS IN AFRICA AND WESTERN EURASIA

By Simon Delany, Derek Scott, Tim Dodman and David Stroud.
Wetlands International and International Wader Study Group,
Wageningen, the Netherlands, 2009.
524 pages; colour photographs, maps, tables.
ISBN 978-90-5882-047-1. Hardback, £70.00.

This attractive volume is a heavy-weight in several senses: in avoirdupois, in authorship, in scholarship, and in the very considerable value of the large amount of data recorded between its covers. A4 in size, it weighs almost 2 kg, with 524 pages on quality paper (though with some show-through). The four main editors, who have themselves made major written contributions, have been assisted by a considerable number of other contributors. The number of wader species covered is similarly substantial – 90 in total, including the extinct Canary Islands Oystercatcher *Haematopus meadewaldoi* (just in case it is still around?). Casual Arctic breeders, such as White-rumped *Calidris fuscicollis* and Pectoral Sandpipers *C. melanotos* (whose breeding ranges appear to be spreading west), are not included.

The compilers are to be particularly commended in choosing to include African breeding species, a logical decision since many of the Eurasian species spend the non-breeding season in Africa. There is much less information available concerning the African species, so it is good to have it here, even if there are some bold guesses regarding the

various population sizes.

For conservation purposes it is important to define the geographical limits of the different populations (biogeographic populations, as opposed to subspecies), and defining these is one of the principal aims of the book. In total, while 149 subspecies of the 90 species are recognised, there are 230 biogeographic populations. Another of the features of the book is the identification of 'Key Sites', defined as locations where 1% or more of a population have been counted since 1990. The Key Sites are listed and mapped for each species. There is also a most useful compilation of Key Sites listed by country, which forms a 66-page appendix.

The Species Accounts, which form the vast majority of the book, range from a single page (Canary Islands Oystercatcher), to 10 pages per species (Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*), though more typically there are 3–5 pages per species. Each account commences with a single photograph of the species concerned (some better than others), and then follows a standard format, with discussion of geographical distribution, move-

ments, population limits and sizes, conservation status, habitat and ecology, and the key sites for the species concerned. Each of these sections is a thorough and up-to-date review of what is known. A detailed distribution map is provided for each species, usually occupying a full page, covering both breeding and non-breeding areas for all populations, and indicating the locations of the key sites.

Even the most avid wader enthusiast is hardly likely to read this book from cover to cover, but it amply repays dipping into; no-one can fail to learn from it. Moreover, its conservation value is immense, and it will be invaluable to those concerned with wader and wetland conservation. Species and areas for which there is a lack of data are highlighted, and this will surely stimulate further research.

The amount of work needed to produce this atlas was clearly very considerable, and all involved are to be congratulated for putting such a volume of data on record. Its publication highlights the need for similar compilations for the Americas, and for eastern Asia and Australia, particularly the Far East, where the threats to wader populations seem to be particularly great, centred on the all-important Yellow Sea area.

This is a book that every wader enthusiast with an interest in Europe or Africa will want for their library, though some may balk at the price.

Richard Chandler

BIRDS OF ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

By John Ash and John Atkins.
Christopher Helm, A&C Black,
London, 2009. 463 pages;
872 distribution maps; many
colour and black-and-white
photographs and tables.
ISBN 978-1-4081-0979-3.
Hardback, £45.00.

Eleven years ago, John Ash and John Miskell published the groundbreaking *Birds of Somalia*, mapping bird distributions for what was probably the least-known country in Africa. With this new book, Ash and John Atkins complete a survey of the birdlife of the Horn of Africa in unprecedented depth and scholarship. This is a hugely important account of the birds and their environment, in the

historical and wonderful country of Ethiopia, which was a volcanically explosive landscape until about four million years ago, and then became a southern glacial outpost in the ice ages. Its heart is a great mass of lava, rising to over 4,000 m, bisected by the Rift Valley, and isolated by desert, river and sea, leading to both speciation and relative impoverishment. Together with Eritrea, it has some 32

endemic species, remarkable for the fact that they represent no less than 22 families – including an ibis (Threskiornithidae), a goose (Anatidae), a rail (Rallidae), a plover (Charadriidae), a pigeon (Columbidae) and others. On the other hand, there are just four bulbuls (Pycnonotidae), compared with 25 in neighbouring Kenya, and half as many sunbirds (Nectariniidae) and bush-shrikes (Malaconotidae) as in Kenya. Of the 837 species recorded from the region, 490 breed, while Palearctic migrants account for about 190.

From a conservation standpoint, the situation is not encouraging. The human population has risen from about 24 million in 1970 to nearly 80 million today, putting huge pressure on the environment and, at this rate of growth, an ultimately unsustainable burden. However, there is much progress being made, with the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, in conjunction with other organisations, spearheading the identification of Important Bird Areas, and strategies for implementation of conservation measures. In this context, *Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea* constitutes an extremely valuable base-

line of data, not only for bird distribution, but also for many aspects of the environment. These are covered in the introductory chapters, which deal with such subjects as topography and hydrology, soils, vegetation, climate and rainfall, bird habitats, conservation, breeding seasons and migration. A following section, with 15 explanatory maps in colour, addresses the methodology and sources of information.

Caroline Ash has contributed an interesting chapter on the history of ornithological research, and its often-colourful pioneers, in the context of the sometimes turbulent social and political history. There are superb colour photos of 29 endemic species, though the habitat photos are in black and white.

About 100,000 records, of which nearly three-quarters are taken from the authors' own observations, form the basis for the maps, resulting from 13 years of intensive work, while the senior author's records date back over 30 years. The literature has been combed for the remainder, and sources are listed in the 25-page bibliography. The maps are based on a grid of one-degree numbered

squares, each divided into four, lettered, half-degree squares. In the informative text accompanying the maps, data can thus be located down to these half-degree squares. Considering how much of the country can seem difficult of access, it is amazing how few tetrads there are from which there are no records, and the authors themselves have visited no less than 70% of the total.

The maps, tinted brown rather than light grey as in the *Birds of Somalia*, are large and clear, set three to a page, and measure 7 x 7 cm, allowing a generous half-column text of up to 20 or so lines per species. In addition to status and migration, there is much data on breeding, so that when used in conjunction with the new Helm field guide to the *Birds of the Horn of Africa* there is now a wealth of information for conservationists and birders. I can wholeheartedly recommend this extremely impressive and well-produced book for anyone interested in African birds and their conservation – and it sets a high benchmark for anyone engaged in similar projects.

Martin Woodcock

A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF JAMAICA

By Ann Haynes-Sutton, Audrey Downer and Robert Sutton.
Christopher Helm, A&C Black,
London, 2009.

304 pages; numerous colour
photographs; many maps.
ISBN 978-1-4081-0743-0.
Paperback, £24.99.

The latest of a 'rush' of recent guides to the Greater Antilles, this book updates a photographic guide to Jamaica published almost 20 years ago. The wealth of new data garnered since makes it inherently valuable for the updated distribution maps (far superior to anything previously available for this endemic-rich island) and status details alone.

Following the introduction are the species accounts, divided into breeding and regular species, with casual visitors being treated summarily and without photographs, *contra* the publisher's catalogue. This is sensible: I haven't seen any of the 'vagrants' on Jamaica in six visits. In the first section, each double-page spread features 1–4 species, with emphasis on endemics, specialities, etc. Texts cover local names, taxonomy (but no discussions thereof), description, similar species, voice, and habitat and behaviour, with one or more of these sometimes omitted. Scaly-naped Pigeon *Patagioenas squamosa* appears short-changed, perhaps accidentally? An inset box shows overall range, Jamaican status and a colour-coded map.

The shortcomings of photographic guides are well known, but

these authors have done well. Many relevant plumages are portrayed, not just adults, and the majority were taken either on Jamaica or on nearby island groups. The quality and percentage taken by the principal photographer, Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet, are stunningly high. One could argue that more text might have been jettisoned, letting the captions do the work. When different subspecies are portrayed, as on p. 129, how they differ from those on Jamaica needs stating. The caption to Ring-tailed Pigeon *Patagioenas caribaea* on p. 127 is inappropriate, the Jamaican Mango *Anthracothonax mango* on p. 162 with white in the tail-sides (not tips) is aberrant (which is unclear) and the species' name is omitted on p. 288.

'Slips' are acceptably few, although Isla de San Andrés belongs to Colombia (not

Columbia; p. 134) and Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis* has not only been seen recently but documentation published (unlike for

many vagrants). Despite this guide's portability, I can't see many potential users investing, especially if they already own the pocket-size

West Indian field guide, unless they plan to visit only Jamaica.

Guy M. Kirwan

**BIRDS OF THE
COTSWOLDS:
A NEW BREEDING ATLAS**

By Iain Main, Dave Pearce and
Tim Hutton. Liverpool
University Press, 2009.
234 pages; 100 colour photos;
280 colour maps.
ISBN 978-1-84631-210-6.
Hardback, £24.99.

The last ten or twelve years have seen a series of excellent regional avifaunas appear: those covering Dorset, Essex, the Isle of Man, Norfolk, Shetland, Suffolk and Wiltshire immediately spring to mind. Many have combined traditional accounts of the distribution and abundance of birds with results from 'atlas' fieldwork. And certainly, the presence of maps greatly enhances their appeal – at least to this reader. The advances in publishing technology have also made massive improvements to the style and presentation of these books, with colour images, maps and diagrams freely inserted where needed, rather than being collected together in sections at the back.

While it is fun to read about the exotics found at migrant hotspots in Shetland and Norfolk, it can be argued that detailed local studies are more important than an account of Britain's first record of

Natterer's Chatterer. This modest little book is exactly that sort of thing. The Cotswolds are not a migrant trap and probably rarely feature in pager reports. However, the authors have drawn together an overview of the distribution of about 100 species that breed more or less regularly in their area. Ninety of these are discussed in detail, including a double-page spread with tetrad maps showing the present distribution, that of an earlier survey (1983–87) and a third showing gains and losses between the two. The last of these is especially interesting, showing devastating reductions in previously widespread birds such as the Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*, Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*, Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* and Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*. Willow Tits *Poecile montana* have gone from two-thirds of the tetrads occupied only 20 years earlier. Equally alarming must be the declines of regionally more local species such as the Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* and, surprisingly to me, Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*. Only partly offsetting these, the authors report increased numbers of Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*, Coal Tits *Periparus ater*, Eurasian Nuthatches

Sitta europaea and Pied Wagtails *Motacilla alba*, the last being found in over twice as many tetrads as in the 1983–87 survey, an even higher increase than the BTO Breeding Bird Survey regional data suggest.

Nor are the authors afraid to undertake a degree of self-criticism! Several species that appear to have increased in numbers may have been under-recorded in the earlier survey. The Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* is a case in point: it is apparently much more widespread now, but the authors suggest that this may simply be down to observers working harder for this latest atlas in some of the heavily wooded parkland. The increases in Coal and Long-tailed Tits *Aegithalos caudatus*, however, seem to be real and unrelated to changed observer effort.

While we know many of these results from BTO surveys, it is salutary to observe them at a local level. Congratulations to the authors and their hard-working recorders on a lovely book, which is enhanced by a series of delightful photographs, almost all taken by members of the local bird club. I don't suppose that this book will feature as BB 'Bird Book of the Year', but it is a model to which other local avifaunas should aspire.

David T. Parkin

**BIRDS NEW TO NORFOLK: THE ACCOUNTS OF THEIR
DISCOVERY AND IDENTIFICATION**

By Keith Dye, Mick Fiszer and Peter Allard. Wren Publishing,
Sheringham, 2009. 412 pages; many colour plates and black-and-white
illustrations. ISBN 978-0-9542545-3-7. Hardback, £38.50.

Old enough to have seen the pre-war bird-limers of Yarmouth's Denes, I am a sucker for this book. Evocatively, it retells the tales of the first examples of the 400-odd birds on the county list. I write '400 odd' because although the number of

birds treated is stated to be 428, my count is 432 species together with at least 51 subspecies, and not including 32 Category D forms, seven 'recent removals' and 19 'possibles'. It is an amazing inventory for just one county and some may

view its contents as too liberal. For example, the much-debated Cley harrier of the 1957/58 winter is unequivocally listed as a Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus hudsonius*. In truth, the mighty hawk remains, after 51 years, no more than a probable with the certain first (from Scilly in 1982/83) argued over for only half as long. Does another controversy lurk in the story of an eastern Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis dulcivox* in 1998? I see in it the substance not of that race but

of its partly sympatric congener, the Oriental Sky Lark *A. gulgula*. More cogently, other firsts to Norfolk's avian stock will surely be added by the biggest county residency of rarity hunters in Britain.

Blessed with bird-holding habitats and perceptive observers, Norfolk has acted for six centuries as a main engine of British ornithology. This is made clear in a succinct introduction, which itemises the county's unique treasure of historical references, and even includes a touching lament for the fabled Wisbech sewage-farm, lost in 1985. A chronology of bird recording (from early pot content through the nineteenth-century zenith of collection to the rise of field study) precedes the systematic list. This presents an undivided compound of Category A, B and C taxa. At least 32 of these represent firsts for

county and nation, and these are accorded the fullest treatments of up to four pages. Overall, the 541 species texts and mentions fill 372 rich pages.

Generally, the individual accounts begin with the earliest dated specimen or bird and, where possible, its provenance is established in topical references (dating back to 1519) and extended for modern rarities by enthusiastic finders' tales. For me, the old stories fascinate most. The first Sanderling *Calidris alba* is clinched in 1668, Sir Thomas Browne calling it the 'May chitt', noting its lack of 'an heel' and advising that after a month off passage, they 'grow very fatt and are accounted a dayntie dish'. The shift from lip-smacking 'yum-yum' to today's hysterical 'mega' shows how the human valuation of wild birds has changed!

In the middle of the book, Richard Richardson's fond painting of the first-ever British family of Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* leads in 18 well-lit photographs of mounted specimens and skins, and 14 more variably illuminated shots of recent rarities. These provide a welcome break from the texts, which are otherwise only thinly sprinkled with black-and-white vignettes. The species accounts offer no hint of the full status in Norfolk and, to set what is a truly wonder-filled catalogue of firsts into context, it is best to have a copy of Taylor *et al.* *The Birds of Norfolk* (1999) close to hand. Otherwise, the three authors and the publisher have done their bird-glorious county a considerable service – and initiated a new genre of county bird books?

D. I. M. Wallace

**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
COMPLETE BIRDS
OF THE WORLD**

Edited by Tim Harris.
National Geographic Society,
Washington DC, 2009.
384 pages; c. 900 colour
photographs and illustrations;
193 distribution maps.
ISBN: 978-1-4262-0403-6.
Hardback, £20.00.

I always worry when I see the word 'complete' in a book's title as generally it proves to be misleading! To me, the title suggests that every bird in the world is covered – when in fact it is the 193 bird families

that get the treatment. The team of ten authors has described each family under the headings of Structure, Plumage, Voice, Habitat, Movements, Diet, Breeding and Taxonomy. There are 19 families which each represent just one species, while the Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae) span no fewer than 400 species! As a result, the texts vary in length, but are mostly between 350 and 1,000 words. The order used is that adopted by Howard & Moore and scientific names are allocated somewhat inconsistently in the text and elsewhere. A distribution map accompanies each section and with these are statistics on the number

of genera and species within each family, together with information on conservation status and distribution. The choice of photographs is good and in some cases paintings are used instead. Scattered throughout the book are fact boxes with information about various aspects of ecology and behaviour pertinent to the family in question. It is quite useful to have a series of concise texts about the world's bird families in one volume. It seems that other publishers take the same view, as in the last three years at least two other attractive books have covered the same ground.

Keith Betton

Also received:

**RAPTORS: A FIELD GUIDE TO
SURVEY AND MONITORING**

By Jon Hardey, Humphrey Crick, Chris Wernham, Helen Riley, Brian Etheridge and Des Thompson. The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, 2009. 370 pages, numerous line-drawings and figures; colour photographs of chicks and feathers; includes a CD of raptor vocalisations.

ISBN 978-0-11-497345-2.

Paperback, £18.99.

Second edition (see *Brit. Birds* 100: 249 for review of first edn), extensively revised and updated, with a new colour photographic guide to raptor feathers.

**EUROPEAN REPTILE
AND AMPHIBIAN GUIDE**

By Axel Kwet. New Holland,
London, 2009.
250 pages; many colour

photographs; distribution maps.

ISBN 978-1-84773-444-0.

Hardback, £14.99.

**RSPB WHERE TO DISCOVER
NATURE IN BRITAIN AND
NORTHERN IRELAND**

By Marianne Taylor.
Christopher Helm, A&C Black,
London, 2009. 352 pages; many
colour photographs and access
maps. ISBN 978-1-4081-0864-2.
Paperback, £12.99.

• An atlas of wader populations in Africa and Western Eurasia more. by David A Stroud. and Les Underhill. This publication is a compilation of current knowledge of the numbers, distribution and movements of one of the most remarkable groups of birds in the region covered by the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). Long-term more. Breeding success of African Black Oystercatchers (*Haematopus moquini*) was monitored over three austral summers on Robben Island, South Africa from 2001 to 2004. Robben Island is a busy tourist destination which has a resident population more. Breeding success of African Black Oystercatchers (*Haematopus moquini*) was monitored over three austral summers on Robben Island, South Africa from 2001 to 2004. West Africa's population is unevenly distributed throughout the region, reflecting differences in the physical environment as well as the history of human settlement (see map above). In the arid northern part of the region, only a small, sparse population can be sustained. In the arable regions, where soils are fertile and the climate is favorable for crop cultivation, higher population densities are found. Thus, the Peanut Basin of western Senegal, the Niger-Nigeria border region, central Burkina Faso, and southwestern Chad stand out by their relatively high rural population densities. Settle Many wader species depend for their survival on networks of key sites for breeding, for moulting, and for building reserves of fat and protein to fuel their incredible migrations. Identified key sites are also shown on the maps, and listed in detailed and informative tables. The information presented in this Atlas will be of use and interest to anyone involved in the conservation or study of wetlands and waterbirds. In particular, it will provide parties to international treaties such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and AEWA (under the Convention on Migratory Species) with a basis for the