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Volker Salewski¹, Martin Wikelski¹ & Brooks Childress²

¹Max Planck Institute for Ornithology, Schlossallee 2, 78315 Radolfzell, Germany
<salewski@orn.mpg.de>

²c/o Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Glos. GL2 7BT, U.K.

Comments on Issiaka & Awaïss (2009) “Avifaune des zones humides du Parc National du W du Niger: importance et répartition dans le temps et dans l’espace.”

A recent paper by Issiaka & Awaïss (2009) did not cover all available knowledge of wetland avifauna in the area, but is a contribution to our knowledge of it. Papers not referenced therein include Crisler *et al.* (2003) and Ambagis *et al.* (2003), which include bibliographies of previous work. These papers contain summaries and analyses similar to those of Issiaka & Awaïss (2009), and it would have been useful had the latter explicitly updated them. Both analyse the numbers of birds observed, their distribution and monthly presence. It could have been instructive if Issiaka & Awaïss had discussed how their different methods might have produced different results. Their analysis and interpretation could also have been extended by consideration of the wider network of wetlands. The seasonal lake Nyafaru (site PWN4) we are told is one of about 30 lakes in Parc W, but we are not told if these other lakes are of comparable size, whether they dry out at similar times, or where the nearest permanent lake at the end of the dry season would be.

In addition to normal variability in the resources used by waterbirds, the Niger River basin is experiencing significant and complex long-term hydrological changes, particularly at the Sahel–Sudanian boundary (Descroix *et al.* 2009). In order to analyse the avian implications of these changes it is vital that waterbird records be comparable between studies and linked to meaningful environmental measurements. Though many of the environmental variables that contribute to waterbird distribution are beyond the capacity of many studies, every effort should nonetheless be made to include those that most directly impact upon waterbird habitats. Stream gauge data are available for the Niger upstream at Diamangou as well as for the Tapoa and Mékrou

rivers, and monthly summaries for the study period would have been useful indicators of the hydrological changes occurring (Descroix *et al.* 2009). Ambagis *et al.* (2003) were also wanting in this regard.

Understanding over what distances and times waterbirds respond to changes in their habitats around Parc W is a considerable challenge and requires study of the ecology of individual species. Ambagis *et al.* (2003) mentioned habitat preferences of some waterbirds, and it would be useful for future studies to look in more detail at the complexities of waterbird habitats in Parc W with a view to identifying habitat-characteristic species and the environmental variables that affect them.

There are a number of differences in the species lists of Issiaka & Awaïss (2009), Crisler *et al.* (2003) and Ambagis *et al.* (2003). The two earlier papers include many waterbird species not mentioned by Issiaka & Awaïss (2009), *e.g.* *Phalacrocorax carbo*, *Anhinga rufa*, *Ixobrychus minutus*, *Plegadis falcinellus*, *Pandion haliaetus*, *Gallinula angulata*, *Glareola pratincola*, *Gallinago gallinago*, *Tringa stagnatilis*, *Gelochelidon nilotica*, *Chlidonias leucopterus*, *Alcedo cristata* and *Ceyx pictus*. However, most of these species were judged relatively uncommon in the earlier papers and so could have been overlooked. On the other hand, Issiaka & Awaïss (2009) list three species as being very abundant, which are assessed as rare or uncommon by the earlier studies: *Ardea goliath*, *Ixobrychus sturmii* and *Gallinula chloropus*. Such different estimates merit closer examination and justification as does the seemingly new species for Niger included by Issiaka & Awaïss (2009): *Vanellus superciliosus*.

We are grateful to Joost Brouwer for helpful comments on a draft of this note.

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P.W.P. Browne¹ & Adam Manvell²

¹115 Crichton Street, Ottawa, K1M 1V8, Canada. <pbrowne@primus.ca>

²14 Gloucester Street, Norwich NR2 2DX, U.K.