



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



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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

have dispersed to all terrestrial habitats and land areas (needed for global analysis), their taxonomy is well-understood (needed for diversity analysis) and their geographical distributions are well-known (needed for mapping). Data on other animals and plants are also presented, and they generally support the conclusions drawn from birds. The analysis is based on all land-birds with an overall range < 50000 km²; this includes 27% of all bird species and 77% of threatened species. The ranges of these species are combined to identify EBAs: areas with more than one such species entirely restricted to them. It excludes some species of conservation interest, especially large birds inhabiting big ranges at low density (e.g. bustards, storks and cranes), but such species often include EBAs within their ranges.

The global coverage means that Africa gets only six pages to itself, but this ignores frequent mentions in more general sections. West Africa (as defined by Malimbus's area of coverage) has eight EBAs: Cape Verde Islands, Upper Guinea forests, Cameroon mountains, Cameroon-Gabon lowlands, Príncipe, São Tomé, eastern Zaire lowlands and Albertine Rift mountains. Alternative taxonomic treatment of one species would add a ninth: Pagalú (Annobon). All except Cape Verde are mainly or exclusively forest, as are most restricted-range bird species and EBAs world-wide. Habitat destruction is obviously the greatest threat to these areas and their birds.

There is not much here to surprise anyone with a knowledge of the West African avifauna but the book is packed with useful facts and figures on which to base conservation arguments and planning. It will be an essential reference for those whose role includes these activities and will hold the attention of anyone interested in bird conservation.

Alan Tye

Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade. Paul Erdmann Isert's *Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia* (1788). Transl. and ed. by S.A. Winsnes, 1992. 278 + x pp.. Oxford University Press, Oxford. ISBN 0-19-726105-1. Hardback £30.

This is the first published English translation of the original German text (*Reise nach Guinea und den Caribäischen Inseln in Columbia*) by this respected amateur botanist with broad scientific interests, who worked for the Danes on the Gold Coast. The translator has thoroughly edited the text, giving additional information on the background to Isert's presence on the coast, and has included some drawings (two of birds, one first described by Isert) which were not in the original work.

Isert travelled to West Africa in 1783 as chief surgeon at Christiansborg Castle (Accra) and other Danish forts in the area, during the brief period of Danish expansion on the Gold Coast. He was there for three years, during which he journeyed east to Whydah in the Kingdom of Dahomey (now in Benin Republic) and inland as far as Akwapem, where he returned later to establish a plantation, in order to render transport