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Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest
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Reviews — Revues

An Atlas of Wader Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia, ed. by S. Delany, D. Scott, T. Dodman & D. Stroud (2009). 521 pp. Wetlands International, Wageningen. ISBN 78-90-5882-047-1, hardback €75/£70 from <www.nhbs.com>.

This landmark publication, which has been 10 years in the making, contains species accounts by 25 contributing authors, covering the 90 wader species that occur in an area from the extreme eastern Canadian islands to central Siberia, central Asia, Iran and Africa, and including the mid-Atlantic islands. Besides providing the usual atlas data, this work has an explicit conservation aim, to provide the information necessary for conservation planning, including the planning of further research and survey.

Each species is divided into “biogeographic populations” (BPs), to facilitate planning of conservation site networks. Some of the resulting 230 BPs match the 149 named subspecies of the 90 species. All BPs are mapped and 876 “Key Sites” defined, where > 1 % of a BP has been counted at least once since 1990. Key sites are listed by country for easy reference in a 65-page annex. This site approach is found less useful for dispersed breeders, where breeding-range conservation depends on widespread land-use practices. All of this is thoroughly discussed in the introductory sections.

The species accounts occupy almost 400 pages, with 2–10 pages each, the longer ones having many pages dedicated to their list of key sites. Most of the Afrotropical species get fairly brief accounts (2–3 pages). Each account includes a photo (except for extinct species), subspecies list, range, movements, definition of BPs, population sizes, trends and threats, habitat and ecology, key sites and their protection status, maps, and tables of data for key sites. Despite an apology in the introduction for comparatively poor coverage of non-English language literature, the accounts seem well-referenced and authoritative, certainly sufficient to identify gaps in knowledge.

There are some small faults, such as some maps not matching distribution descriptions and a few spelling errors. My main criticism is that the maps of sites and counts are not all on the same scale and a variety of projections is used. To some extent this is understandable given the extreme differences between species in overall ranges. However, they could have been a little more standardized, which would have made comparison and rapid assessment of relative population sizes easier. European and African ranges of a single species are often split onto two separate maps with much overlap, whereas combining the two onto a single map would in many cases have permitted use of a larger scale and improved clarity.

However, these are minor points when weighed against the enormous overall value of this massive compilation. All wader workers in Africa will need to refer to this book and the editors are to be congratulated in bringing it to fruition.

Alan Tye