



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



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The Threatening Desert: Controlling Desertification, by Alan Grainger, 1990. Pp 369. ISBN 1-85383-041-0. Earthscan Publications Ltd, London. £9.95 softback.

Africa contains a greater area of dry lands than any other continent and it is in Africa that the effect of droughts and subsequent famine is most pronounced. The Sahelian drought of the 1970s prompted the United Nations Conference on Desertification in 1977 and the Sahel drought plays a central role in this book's discussion of desertification.

Long term climatic change is discussed with reference to global and local effects but the main focus of this book is on more immediate local causes of desertification and their control at national and local levels. Population growth and economic development are considered to be major driving forces leading to changes of land use in dryland areas; government policies on agriculture, trade and development bring this about at a national level and rural policies to concentrate dispersed populations do so at a local level. Desertification is then seen to follow as a consequence of poor land use—whether by overcultivation, overgrazing, deforestation or poor irrigation practices. All these causes are interlinked; an expansion of cash crop cultivation displaces traditional subsistence rain-fed cropping to less suitable and more arid areas. In turn that shifts seasonal livestock grazing to even more marginal land resulting in overgrazing and land degradation.

The second half of the book considers how desertification can be controlled by improving crop production, livestock raising and planting trees, in addition to farm forestry and natural woodland management. Finally soil conservation and land reclamation projects, together with afforestation, are reviewed with an assessment of their progress to date and their future prospects. The importance of involving local people, identifying their needs, and decentralizing management which now seem so evident were long overlooked in favour of large-scale prestige projects. There is clearly much to learn with regard to man's impact on arid land ecosystems and this book is an excellent starting point.

Roger Wilkinson

Homeward Bound: Problems Waders Face when Migrating from the Banc d'Arguin, Mauritania, to their Northern Breeding Grounds. Ed. by B.J. Ens, T. Piersma, W.J. Wolff & L. Zwarts, 1990. 364 pp. Ardea 78 (1/2), issue separately published by WIWO/RIN, Texel. ISBN 90-70202-131 (ISSN 0373-2266). Available from WIWO, Van Stuijvenbergweg 4, 6644 AB Ewijk, Netherlands, for Dfl 55 paid to postgiro a/c 2666009, or by Eurocheque or postal money order (Dfl 70 by any other means).

This collection of refereed papers is based on Dutch work in Mauritania since 1980. The articles are mainly by various combinations of a small group of authors and focus