



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



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crowded East African field guide community. The shortcomings mentioned could perhaps be put right in a second edition, but the saddest news is that the monstrous Elsevier has swallowed up Academic Press and its bird imprint Poyser, and has decided to suppress the latter and no longer publish bird books. Since some of the best bird guides and monographs to appear in recent years have come out under this imprint, this loss is serious. Poyser's high standards, as maintained in this book, are and will be hard to match.

Alan Tye

**Important Bird Areas in Africa and Associated Islands**, ed. by L.D.C. Fishpool & M.I. Evans, 2001. 1144 + xvi pp. Birdlife International, Cambridge. ISBN 1-874357-20-X, hardback, £55.

There are 1228 IBAs in Africa and its islands (including the central and S Atlantic, and W and S Indian Ocean) that are presented in this book, of which only 343 (28%) fall within the 40% of Africa defined by WAOS's area of coverage. The density of IBAs is higher in E Africa, Ethiopia and Madagascar, with very few in the Sahara, Sahel and especially in the Congo basin, regions that make up about half of WAOS's area of coverage. Whether this represents a true situation or lack of knowledge is not clear. I would guess that for the Sahara and Sahel it is indeed a true picture, but that other parts of W Africa are under-represented due to lack of information.

The Introduction to the book starts with a question: why bother with birds? The answer, referring to the "intricate linkages between all components of the Earth we live in" sums up Birdlife's conservation philosophy, that conserving birds helps lead to a sustainable future for all life on earth: birds are conspicuous and well-known indicators of biodiversity. The main objective of this book is to identify the most important sites for bird conservation, using a standard methodology, as a tool for planning and management. The methods for site selection are outlined, with criteria including: holds significant numbers of a threatened species; is a significant part of an Endemic Bird Area (as defined by A.J. Stattersfield *et al.* 1998. *Endemic Bird Areas of The World*. Birdlife, Cambridge); contains a significant component of a group of species more or less confined to the biome of the site; supports  $\geq 1\%$  of a biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird or of the global population of a congregatory seabird or a terrestrial species; supports  $\geq 20,000$  waterbirds or  $\geq 10,000$  pairs of seabirds. The major biomes in W Africa are Sahara, Sahel, Sudan-Guinea savanna, Guinea-Congo forests and Afrotropical highlands. Photographs of some of these are included.

The remainder of the Introduction explains how to use the book and presents pan-African summaries. Almost half of all African IBAs are unprotected by law and many

are poorly known, and a series of recommendations is given for survey, monitoring, policy and planning, management, awareness raising and institutional strengthening.

Most of the book comprises country chapters, each of which consists of an introduction covering landforms, vegetation, endemic and threatened species (not just birds), ornithological importance, conservation infrastructure, and an inventory of IBAs. For each IBA there is a site description, bird list, threatened and endemic non-birds, conservation issues and references. Finally come dense appendices covering, among other things, all of Africa's bird species and the IBA criteria that they could potentially fulfil, and lists of species that actually do fulfil certain criteria.

A few points might be improved in a revised edition. The country maps have IBAs indicated by dots, rather than an outline of their shape. In some cases it would not be possible to give a true outline, but in many it would, and this would help to give a better idea of site size and position. It is not always clear how the less well-defined sites were selected, especially in fairly uniform areas such as the Sahara and Sahel. Numbers of IBAs per country or per land area vary markedly between countries, to some degree reflecting biological diversity but also suggesting that the criteria were not fully standardised between countries/contributors. Similarly, the introductory sections to the country accounts vary greatly in degree of detail: contrast the eight pages for St Helena, Ascension & Tristan with the 2.5 pages for the more diverse São Tomé e Príncipe. Thus the chapters seem to reflect the knowledge, care and interest of the different contributors. I noticed few factual errors, but some of the maps are poor. One of the worst is Tanzania, where many dots are in the wrong place, including mainland sites indicated on the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba, and vice versa.

This is an excellent reference book: a source of facts and (especially) figures. It is not easy reading, although the country introductions are often fascinating. Few individuals will want to buy it, but it is an indispensable tool for conservation planning, so anyone involved in conservation (not just of birds) in Africa should ensure they have access to the chapters for their countries of interest.

Alan Tye

**Birds of Western & Central Africa, illustrated checklist.** par Ber van Perlo, 2002. Collins, London. ISBN 000-2201186, paperback, £19.99.

Insistons d'emblée sur le titre "Illustrated Checklist", car il ne s'agit pas d'un guide conventionnel mais plutôt d'un aide-mémoire illustré. L'un des soucis constants de l'auteur était de rester dans les limites d'un livre de poche. Le format est de 19 x 12 cm, c'est-à-dire celui du Serle & Morel (1977) ou encore du célèbre Peterson, chose remarquable si l'on tient compte de l'énorme superficie couverte (Ouest et Centre