



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



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EDITORIAL

The Future

As the Society enters its 21st year it may congratulate itself for fulfilling its primary office, that of publishing its journal, without break and (except for a hiccup in '73-'74) with considerable regularity ever since the first unpretentious bulletin in May 1964. Insignificant as some articles may have seemed at the time, our innumerable checklists and regional reports on avifaunas and notes and papers on individual species have accumulated into a mass of data, the *sine qua non* for major reviews in African ornithology.

There is, however, cause for alarm. Judging from numbers of pages, our bumper years were 1977-1980, but since the all-time high of 160 pp in 1980 each subsequent year has seen a decrease - 116 pp in 1981, 108 in 1982 and 96 in 1983. Lack of material is the reason for this number of *Malimbus* being slim and three months late; and the prognosis for 1984 is not good. If suitable submissions continue to decline, publication shall have to become less than bi-annual, or the Society might have to consider combining its assets with a stronger one. A further uncertainty stems from the present Editor seeking relief from his post. The rewarding task of editing carries with it the burdensome ones of production (photo-perfect originals) and despatch, and two years of enquiries have not yet revealed any replacement for this office, or viable alternative arrangement. Council welcomes members' views on all of the above matters.

African Literature

This issue carries a review of the important 'The Birds of Africa', a scholarly and well illustrated treatise which is attempting to set down in its several volumes every salient fact pertaining to each one of the continent's 1,850 or so bird species. Certainly, the time is ripe for such a gargantuan review of knowledge. Besides *Malimbus* (WAOS) and the much older and more prestigious *Ostrich* (SAOS), other journals have been contributing importantly to the stockpile of information: *Honeyguide* (Zimbabwe OS), *Scopus* (EANHS), *Bulletin of Zambian OS*, *Southern Birds* (Witwatersrand BC), and of course museums journals like *Arnoldia* and *Durban Mus. Novit.* and such European nationals as *Alauda*, *Bull. Brit. OC*, *Gerfaut* and *Ibis*. Not that bird journals and magazines have the monopoly: the annual '*Bibliography of African Ornithology*' supplementary to *Malimbus* from 1975 onward shows that germane ornithology appears in at least 100 biological journals.

In addition, the past few years have seen a phenomenal growth in African bird books. In the absence of any regular review feature few have been

Undoubtedly the book's most troublesome feature is the indirect labelling of plate illustrations. It is difficult to decipher a reduced silhouette key, and in order to find the name of a plate illustration the reader has to count images on a sometimes crowded page (like Plate 32). Readability could be improved if, beside each illustration, the label or reference code to an accompanying key were provided. Otherwise little space would be sacrificed if silhouettes matched illustrations in size and had labels superimposed rather than referred to by a number. The usefulness of the book as an identification aid would also be increased, and accounts of field characters complemented, if pointers directing attention to diagnostic features were added to the plates.

"The Birds of Africa" will be needed by libraries and coveted by ornithologists unable to afford it. The jacket price may deter some of those able to make best use of it, although handsome discounts have been available through major ornithological societies including WAOS. Improvements in labelling and style of the plates, and distribution maps of a higher standard, would be welcome in future volumes which will be eagerly awaited.

A. M. Jones

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noticed in *Malimbus*; but a mere list of titles of some recent works of more serious intent may be of interest.

Bundy, G. (1976) *The Birds of Libya*. Pp 102. Brit. Orn. Union, London.

Benson, C.W. & Benson, F.M. (1977) *The Birds of Malawi*. Pp 263. Limbe, Malawi.

Cramp & Simmons (1977-) *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Vol. I (1977) pp 722, Vol. II (1980) pp 695, Vol. III (1983) pp 913. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford.

Irwin, M.P.S. (1978) *A Bibliography of the Birds of Rhodesia*. Pp 241. Rhodesian Orn. Soc., Salisbury.

Snow, D.W. (ed.) (1978) *An Atlas of Speciation in African Non-Passerine Birds*. Pp 390. Brit. Mus. Nat. Hist., London.

Newman, K. (1979) *Birdlife in Southern Africa*. Rev. ed., pp 252. Macmillan Johannesburg.

Pakenham, R.H.W. (1979) *The Birds of Zanzibar and Pemba*. Pp 134. Brit. Orn. Union, London.

Thomsen, P. & Jacobsen, P. (1979) *The Birds of Tunisia*. Pp 165. Copenhagen.

Britton, P.L. (ed.) (1980) *Birds of East Africa*. Pp 271. EANHS, Nairobi.

Brown, L.H. & Britton, P.L. (1980) *The Breeding Seasons of East African Birds*. Pp 164. EANHS, Nairobi.

- Cyrus, D. & Robson, N. (1980) Bird Atlas of Natal. Pp 320. Pietermaritzburg.
- Jensen, J.V. & Kirkeby, J. (1980) The Birds of the Gambia. Aarhus. Pp 284. Aros Nature Guides, Aarhus C.
- Curry-Lindahl, K. (1981) Bird Migration in Africa. 2 vols, pp 695. Academic Press, London.
- Gore, M.E.J. (1981) Birds of The Gambia. Pp 130. Brit. Orn. Union, London.
- Irwin, M.P.S. (1981) The Birds of Zimbabwe. Pp 464. Quest, Harare.
- Louette, M. (1981) The Birds of Cameroon. Pp 295. AWLSK, Brussels.
- Brown, L.H., Urban, E.K. & Newman, K. (1982) The Birds of Africa. Vol. I, pp 521. Academic Press, London.
- Elgood, J.H. (1982) The Birds of Nigeria. Pp 246. Brit. Orn. Union, London.
- Schmidl, D. (1982) The Birds of the Serengeti National Park, Tanzania. Pp 132. Brit. Orn. Union, London.
- Steyn, P. (1982) Birds of Prey of Southern Africa. Pp 309. David Philip, Cape Town.
- Thévenot, M. et al. (1982) Compte Rendu d'Ornithologie Marocaine, Année 1981. Pp 118. Université Mohammed V, Rabat.
- Phipson, L.P. & Maclean, G.L. (1983) Ostrich Index Vols. 21-50 1951-1979. Pp 225. S. Afr. Orn. Soc., Johannesburg.
- Rowan, M.K. (1983) The Doves, Parrots, Louries and Cuckoos of Southern Africa. Pp 429. David Philip, Cape Town.

In press, books or book-length papers:

- Colston, P. & Curry-Lindahl, K. The birds of the Mt. Nimba region of Liberia.
- Dean, W.R.J. & Huntley, M.A. An updated list of the birds of Angola.
- Ash, J.S. & Miskell, J.E. Atlas of birds of Somalia.

In preparation, bird atlases for Morocco, Sudan, Kenya, Botswana and Transvaal.