

REVIEWS

The end of the East-Atlantic flyway: waders in Guinea-Bissau. Ed. Wim J. Wolff. 1998. WIWO Report 39. 93 pp.

Waterbirds in Kneiss, Tunisia, February 1994. Eds T.M. van der Hawe, N. Baccetti, G.O. Keijl & M. Zenatello. 1997. WIWO Report 54. 140 pp.

European songbirds and Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* in Ghana: a quest for Constant Effort Sites and swallow roosts in December/January 1996/97. Eds Bennie van den Brink, Rob G. Bijlsma & Tom van der Hawe. 1998. WIWO Report 58. 53 pp.

Cranes (*Grus grus*) in NW-Russia in autumn 1996. Eds Toom Veerman & Henk Wessels. 1998. WIWO Report 59. 20 pp.

Ecological aspects of Pygmy Cormorants *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* at Prespa, Greece, May-August 1996. Frank J. Willems & Etienne de Vries. 1998. WIWO Report 60. 70 pp. plus appendices.

Breeding waders at Cape Sterlegova, northern Taimyr, in 1994. I. Tulp, H. Schekerman, T. Piersma, J. Jukema, P. de Goeij, & J. van de Kam. 1998. WIWO Report 61. 87 pp.

Available from Stichting WIWO, Fetha, 3633 CT Vreeland, THE NETHERLANDS.

The above six hot-off-the-press WIWO reports arrived simultaneously at the Avian Demography Unit for review in *Safring News*.

Four of the six reports deal with species with southern African connections, and this review will concentrate on these. But we will spare a



thought for the expedition that set out to ring Cranes in Russia: 22 days in the field and not a single bird ringed, although of course they collected other valuable data. The Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* is a near-threatened species with a fragmented distribution between the Adriatic and Caspian seas. For a species breeding in Europe remarkably little is known of its basic biology, and Willems and de Vries, two Dutch students at the University of Nijmegen, set out to rectify this. Their study area was at a breeding colony at a wetland near the Greek-Albanian border.

On to the African reports, and the 'honorary' African one.

A debate about whether the East Atlantic Flyway ends at Cape Point or Cape Agulhas can be tolerated; to unilaterally declare Guinea-Bissau (12°N) to be the end is a clear case of geographical myopia. Misgivings about the title of the report aside, the main contents consist of a series of 10 research reports, written by the various participants, covering aspects such as wader numbers, wader morphometrics, tern ecology, fish, crabs and benthic fauna of the inter-tidal area, and avifaunistic observations. This report has been published some five years after the expedition – the report had clearly been allocated the number 39 long ago! Because of the delay, many of the results have already been published – altogether 11 journal articles and five reports are listed.

The Kneiss wetland in Tunisia is one of the largest wetlands in the Mediterranean basin – 133 000 waterbirds were counted in February 1994, of which 77 000 were Dunlin and 20 000 Redshanks. Species familiar to southern African ringers include 9 000 Grey Plovers, 4 500 Little Stints and 2 000 Whimbrels; there were also 1 000 Curlew Sandpipers – Kneiss is one of the northernmost nonbreeding localities for this species. One Curlew Sandpiper that had been ringed on the Black Sea coast of the Ukraine on 8 May 1989, was retrapped by the expedition on 15 February 1994 – this eastwards route from Kneiss to the breeding grounds, confirmed several earlier ring recoveries. One of the main objectives of the expedition was not realised. Although 31 Tunisian wetlands were thoroughly searched, no Slenderbilled Curlews were found, although there are records for earlier years from 12 Tunisian wetlands. This species is thought to be on the brink of extinction, with a likely total population less than 100 birds.

Having spent three summers (1992/93-1994/95) chasing Barn Swallows in Botswana (WIWO report 56 reviewed in *Safring News* 26: 43 (1997)), the Dutch swallow team took a one year break, then shifted their arena to Ghana in December-January 1996/97. The most striking finding was that swallows arrived unexpectedly late, from near the end of December onwards, and had nearly completed primary moult on arrival. A total of 2 049 birds was ringed during the expedition, 1 828 of them Barn Swallows. There were two swallow retraps, from Belgium and Italy – that's one foreign retrap per 900 birds

mistnetted! As the EURING swallow project gathers momentum (see report on page 41), Those Safring ringers who are wanting the thrill of foreign retraps and of having their birds retrapped on the breeding grounds know which species to focus on.

Finally to the breeding grounds of the waders. At Sterlegova in the northern Taimyr Peninsula in Siberia, Ingrid Tulp and her colleagues found 65 wader nests in a 12 km² study area on the tundra in 1994. All but one nest (of a Purple Sandpiper) were of species that migrate to southern Africa – 16 Grey Plovers, 1 Ringed Plover, 16 Turnstones, 14 Knots, 3 Sanderlings, 10 Little Stints and 4 Curlew Sandpipers. This WIWO report concentrates on the avifaunistic observations – an appendix lists nine scientific papers published, submitted or in preparation.

All in all, these six reports make a remarkable and diverse contribution to ornithology. The 1983 vision that started WIWO, the Foundation Working Group International Waterbird and Wetland Research, remains a driving force. Long may it continue to “initiate, stimulate and organise scientific research on waterbirds and wetlands and to publish the gathered knowledge for the conservation of the populations involved and their habitats” and in the process, to mobilise that valuable resource, the body of “unpaid volunteers” with their diverse birding and scientific backgrounds.

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