

Important Bird Areas in Africa and Associated Islands: Priority Sites for Conservation edited by Lincoln D.C. Fishpool & Michael I. Evans (2001), xvi + 1,144 pp., Pisces Publications & BirdLife International, Newbury & Cambridge, UK. ISBN 1 874357 20 X (hbk), £55/\$82.50.

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are sites of varying size that are home to important concentrations of birds, principally species of regional or global conservation concern. The IBA programme in Africa is part of a global initiative that began in Europe in the 1980s. It has become common practice to publish details of a whole region's IBAs in book form: documenting and, hopefully, aiding the protection of a network of sites critical for the conservation of that region's birds. Such regional IBA compilations have become a well-used tool for conservationists, ornithologists, governmental and non-governmental agencies, policy-makers, researchers, consultants and planners.

IBA books may cover relatively small regions, such as my own patch, the British Channel Islands, or much larger areas such as Europe. With the publication of this work on Africa the presentation of IBAs has been pushed into a new dimension. Africa is big, the challenge to conservationists is big, and accordingly, this book is big! In more than 1,100 pages, 1,228 IBAs are detailed, their combined area amounting to 7% of the African region.

58 African countries are covered, from the Palaearctic region (Morocco to Egypt) and Cape Verde, through the Afrotropics south to The Cape, with the islands of the Indian Ocean that make up the Malagasy region (Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, La Réunion (France) and The Comoros). Also included are Bouvetpya (Bouvet Island, a Norwegian dependency that is closer to Antarctica than to Africa), St. Helena and its dependencies (Ascension, Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island) and the French island territories of Crozet, Kerguelen, St. Paul and Amsterdam. Prince Edward Island is included in the account for South Africa. The Canary Islands, Madeira and The Azores are not included, but are covered by an earlier BirdLife International (then ICBP) publication *Important Bird Areas in Europe* (1989).

A lengthy and detailed introductory section with a summary in English and French is followed by the individual country accounts, listed alphabetically, that

make up the majority of this book. Each account has its own extensive preliminary section that includes notes on ornithological importance, conservation infrastructure, protected area systems and international measures relevant to each country. Tables present details of restricted-range and biome-restricted species and a country map shows the location of each IBA. A glossary of terms relevant to each country, usually geographical features, abbreviations and the acronyms of conservation bodies, is a very useful feature that completes each account's introduction.

Each country's IBAs are discussed in numerical order, with a description of the site, its birds, other threatened/endemic wildlife and conservation issues. Tables present the key bird species and their population size for each IBA. Important sources for further information and all relevant references are included at the end of each country account.

The final part of the book is made up of 10 lengthy appendices that include lists of international agreements relevant to African nature conservation, the 2,313 bird species of Africa and associated islands (with scientific, English and French names), the 343 bird species of global conservation concern in Africa, those that have a globally restricted range, the distribution of biomes in Africa and their associated species, congregatory water-bird species, the classification of habitat terms used in the book, and species of mammal, reptile and amphibian that are of global conservation concern in the African region.

Each of the country accounts was compiled by relevant, frequently local, experts and the editors of this book and BirdLife International must be highly commended for drawing together such an exceptional amount of data into this huge, but uncluttered, and very readable book. Similar in appearance to BirdLife's *Threatened Birds of the World* (2000), yet even larger still, this book should be bought by everyone involved in the conservation of Africa's birds. Moreover, copies should be bought by all western conservationists and sent out to their counterparts in Africa, where this book will obviously be even more useful.

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The South and South East Asian Ivory Markets by Esmond Martin & Daniel Stiles (2002), 88 pp., Save the Elephants, Nairobi & London. ISBN 9966 9683 2 6, unpriced.

Not content with counting 111,000 individual ivory items on sale in African ivory markets for their 2000 report, *The Ivory Markets of Africa*, (reviewed in *Oryx*, 34(3), 237) Martin and Stiles have performed the same service for Asian markets to produce the present volume. This time they found over 105,000 artefacts in 521 shops in the eight countries surveyed. Their investigations covered, in descending order of importance, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, Cambodia, Nepal, Laos and Sri Lanka. India was omitted because the authors knew from previous experience that very little ivory is displayed for sale in Indian shops.

After so much focus on African elephants and their ivory in recent years, it is most welcome to find a cool analytical spotlight turned on to the Asian situation. Whatever uncertainties there are about elephant numbers in both continents, it is absolutely certain that the Asian elephant *Elephas maximus* is far more vulnerable than its African cousin *Loxodonta africana*, with substantial declines recently reported in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. This is in spite of the fact that all international trade in Asian elephant ivory has been illegal under CITES since 1974. Domestic trade in new wild ivory is forbidden in all countries except Myanmar, while Thailand allows sale of ivory from the cropped tips of domesticated elephant tusks.

Examining the ivory markets themselves, Martin and Stiles found that Thailand was by far the biggest with over 80% of the total number of items seen in Asia on sale in the three main centres of Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phayuha. Tourists from Europe and Asia are the main customers. Myanmar, with 6% of the total, came in as a surprising second, evidently not being as far off the tourist map as admirers of An Sang Su Kai might have hoped. The great majority of items were jewellery or trinkets, easy to conceal and seen as desirable for opportunistic purchase by tourists, in contrast to the skilful carvings sought by connoisseurs in earlier generations. However there were still a few high quality worked pieces to be seen in Bangkok and Singapore, the most expensive one costing US \$116,000. Prices, at an average US \$250 per kg, were about five times higher than those found by the same investigators in Africa. Although most carvers and retailers questioned in the countries surveyed were pessimistic about the future of their business, workshops in China were supplying both the quality market in Singapore and the mass market elsewhere. Where there was evidence from previous visits to the same shops, turnover seemed relatively

slow, with about a third of the stock moving each year

Where is the raw ivory for these markets coming from? According to Martin and Stiles, Thailand is receiving it illegally from Myanmar and various West and Central African countries, the latter source being substantiated by regular seizures. Surprisingly, in view of the size of its ivory market, Thailand's own wild elephant population, estimated at around 1,600, is not considered to have declined. The authors observe 'imports of [illegal] African tusks have reduced the poaching pressures on Thailand's wild elephants'. Vietnam is taking ivory from Laos and Cambodia while Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Sri Lanka supply their markets from their own wild elephant populations. Both in Myanmar and Thailand tips from the tusks of domesticated elephants provide additional supplies for the markets, though Martin and Stiles strongly dispute the opinion of the Thai CITES Director that almost all ivory carved in his country comes from this source.

Neither the mere fact of a significant illegal trade in ivory in Asia nor even the suggestion that elephant populations have declined from some 17,440 to 10,550 since the 1980s in seven of the countries studied constitute proof that poaching Asian elephants for ivory is the main cause of this decline. However the probability is such that, in the absence of strict regulation, it would be right to call for it on a precautionary basis. The problem is that such regulation already exists in the form of a complete ban on international trade in Asian ivory and a virtually complete prohibition of domestic trade. The usual suspects of corruption, lack of enforcement resources and absence of political will are cited, no doubt correctly. Moreover, where is the monitoring of elephant numbers, poaching and other causes of mortality that could constitute the basis for a small sustainable use programme to provide incentives for genuine conservation?

It is noteworthy that the authors found no support for the notion, promulgated during recent CITES debates on the reopening of a small legal trade in African ivory, that such legal trade could encourage Asian markets. They might also have developed further their observation that illegal imports of African ivory into Thailand had eased poaching pressures on wild Thai elephants. Why not allow an increased legal trade from Southern African countries with healthy and indeed unmanageably large elephant numbers, to further this admirable end?

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Handbook of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2001), xxix + 690 pp., includes CD-ROM, Earthscan, London, UK. ISBN 1 85383 748 2 (hbk), £60, 1 85383 737 7 (pbk), £24.95.

Compiled by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, this Handbook contains the full texts of the Convention, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the decisions of the Conference of the Parties from 1994 to 2000. It presents all the most important information about the Convention and the Protocol, including a description of the background to the Convention and its institutional arrangements, a guide to the decisions adopted and a guide to ongoing activities. The accompanying CD-ROM, which is probably more useful than the printed Handbook, contains the electronic version, indexed and cross-referenced, with full search facilities.

The Atlas of Endangered Species by Richard Mackay (2002), 128 pp., Earthscan, London, UK. ISBN 1 85383 874 8 (pbk), £11.99.

This short book provides a brief, colourfully illustrated guide to the world's threatened plants and animals. It provides a concise overview of the inhabitants of the various major ecosystems, and examines the major threats to biodiversity. Colour maps and graphics provide global summaries of species lost, threatened and surviving today, including trees and other plants, birds, mammals, reptiles and insects. The Atlas also includes brief overviews of habitat loss and extinctions in pre-history, overviews of the major ecosystems, and world tables of protected ecosystems, biodiversity and threatened species.

Bats by Phil Richardson (2002), 112 pp., The Natural History Museum, London, UK. ISBN 0565 09167 0 (pbk), £9.95.

Bats is the most recent addition to the Natural History Museum of London's *Life Series*, which provides accessible introductions to the natural world. This well designed book presents a concise overview of bat biology, ecology, behaviour and conservation. In 10 chapters, illustrated throughout with colour photographs, all of the bat groups are introduced in a lively way, with the final chapter providing a useful introduction to bat conservation.

Other publications received at the Editorial Office

Birds of Western Africa (Helm Identification Guides) by Nik Borrow & Rob Demey (2001), 832 pp., Christopher Helm, London, UK. ISBN 0 7136 3959 8 (hbk), £55.

Pheasants, Partridges and Grouse: A Guide to the Pheasants, Partridges, Quails, Grouse, Guineafowl, Buttonquails and Sandgrouse of the World by Steve Madge & Phil McGowan, with Guy M. Kirwan (2002), 488 pp., Christopher Helm, London, UK. ISBN 0 7136 3966 0 (hbk), £45.

The New Naturalist: Moths by Michael E.N. Majerus (2002), 310 pp., Harper Collins, London, UK. ISBN 0 00 220141 0 (hbk), £34.99, 0 00 220142 9 (pbk), £19.99.