
Foreword

Shorebirds make up a very important group of birds, a group that has been the subject of intensive study and conservation initiatives in recent years in the Western Hemisphere. With their long-distance migrations, shorebirds connect habitats and people across the American continent.

The first obvious connection is their use of habitats along the hemisphere. Most species of shorebirds (sandpipers, plovers and relatives) depend upon wetlands for their survival. Recent studies have documented the astonishing rate at which the wetlands of the Americas continue to be drained and filled or otherwise rendered unsuitable for use by shorebirds. Not surprisingly, the precarious relationship between shorebirds and their habitats has not escaped the attention of the conservation community. In the past decade, conservation efforts focusing on wetlands (and specifically shorebirds) have increased dramatically. Our ability to conserve wetlands and shorebirds will be a measure of our ability to ensure our own survival as a species.

The second important connection that shorebirds provide is among researchers. Throughout the years, I have witnessed encounters between researchers who often handle the same individual birds but work in different countries. The need for interactions among researchers working on shorebirds throughout the Americas is paramount. Yet the opportunities for these interactions are rare.

The present volume is the result of a symposium organized to help close this gap. The symposium on the ecology and conservation of shorebirds in the Western Hemisphere was organized as part of the IV Neotropical Ornithology Congress held in Quito, Ecuador, in November 1991. This event served as a forum where the latest research in shorebird migration, ecology and conservation was discussed. What is more important is that the symposium provided a great opportunity to forge scientific partnerships among researchers from many parts of the hemisphere. Simultaneous translations (English-Spanish) were available at all times during the workshop in order to facilitate these exchanges.

Finally, and most importantly, shorebirds connect people. Many efforts to protect shorebirds and their habitats are succeeding because the people of the Americas are working together towards this goal. The linkages that shorebirds provide serve as an inspiration to many people in the hemisphere working to preserve the environment. Maintaining the splendour of the shorebirds' annual migratory flights will be the ultimate recognition to conservationists in North, Central and South America.

The present publication represents the work of many scientists. Collectively, their wide-ranging research interests and efforts, wisely invested in the advancement of our knowledge of shorebird ecology and conservation, are truly monumental. This volume is in recognition of these valiant efforts.

Gonzalo Castro
Chair, Organizing Committee