

Shorebirds in Marine Environments

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My review copy of this work arrived while several colleagues were staying with me to help in fieldwork. To judge by the difficulty I had in retrieving it, and its somewhat worn appearance when I did so, the demand for copies of this important collection of papers will be high!

This symposium on 6 - 7 January 1977, sponsored by the Pacific Seabird Group, heard papers dealing mainly with the Pacific coast of America, with some emphasis on California, together with several papers from elsewhere in America, Europe and the Pacific. The first day was devoted to papers on distribution, migration and conservation and the following half-day to ecology. Unfortunately about half of the papers in the second section appear as abstracts only, although one has been published elsewhere.

It would obviously be inappropriate to review this volume as if it were a single-author book, and the papers presented are listed in "Recent Publications" in this issue. Instead I will comment on some of the similarities and differences between the approaches to wader studies in the Americas and Europe, apparent from many of the contributions and the introductory and summarizing sections. In doing so, I realise the symposium does not claim to be representative of American - or even West-coast - studies, and Dr Pitelka points out several other areas from which he would have liked contributions, e.g. Latin America, government agencies responsible for coastal habitats in U.S. and Canada, and a review on the effects of oil industry in Alaska. (Some aspects of Alaskan studies are, however, dealt with in four papers - seasonal habitat use at Point Barrow (Connors et al), censuses at Nelson Lagoon on the Alaska Peninsula (Gill & Jorgensen), counts at the important migration staging post at the Copper River Delta, S. Alaska (Isleib), and studies on feeding and weight gain at the last site (Senner).

As Pitelka points out in his Preface, shorebird studies have generally proceeded in different ways in Western and Eastern America and Europe. Breeding area studies have dominated much of the American work while this aspect has remained neglected in Europe until very recently - with the notable exception of several excellent Finnish and a few other European studies. Even now, very little work is being done on British breeding waders despite the high density of ornithologists. However, in contrast to North America, armies of mainly amateur ringers in Europe have, in association with the network of amateur counters (outlined in Prater's article), established the general patterns of movements of most European coastal waders. The paper by Harrington and Morrison on Semipalmated sandpipers demonstrates recent progress in this type of migratory study in eastern America but a similar approach seems somewhat neglected on the west coast. Jehl's investigation of the autumn migration of Baird's Sandpiper is an excellent example of an alternative method using museum specimens and published records of occurrence to describe migration routes.

Censuses, generally on a regular basis and often linked with assessments of utilization of different habitats, are well represented at a wide latitudinal range of sites: N, SW and SE Alaska (see above), Humboldt Bay, north California (Gerstenberg), Bolinas, central California (Page et al), other California sites (Jurek), NW Costa Rica (Smith & Stiles), and S Peru (Hughes). It is encouraging to see the application of modern technology where appropriate, with aerial surveys (eg Gill & Jorgensen, Isleib) and computer handling of data (eg Jurek for the California shorebird survey). Europe lags behind in such methodology, probably because of lack of funds or differences of attitude. I suspect the former applies to aerial surveys as opportunities have been grasped (eg Hale 1974, *Ibis* 116: 412; Meltofte 1978, *WSG Bull.* 23:25-31), but the latter may be true of automated data storage and handling as this is as yet less widely used in Europe. For example, although the Dutch ringing scheme long ago computerized its records, the various British Trust for Ornithology projects are only now receiving this treatment (with inevitable difficulties over backlogs), and most organisations have not yet faced the problem.

Despite the differences in background between Europe and America, considerable similarities in the approach to coastal ecological studies are apparent, perhaps because the pressures on coastal areas such as reclamation and oil-related industry are common factors in areas as wide apart as Alaska and the North Sea. Readers of 'territoriality in non-breeding shorebirds' by Myers et al may recall the abstracts in *WSG Bull* 26 by Ens and Townshend; and the investigations on distributions and movements of birds with conspicuous markings (eg Kelly & Cogswell, Shanewise & Herman) have parallels with various studies noted in *WSG Bull* 26 and the present issue, although investigations on the feeding of marked individuals seem lacking in some of the American studies. The importance of behaviour and consequently availability of prey rather than simple abundance is all too often overlooked on both sides of the Atlantic, and I had the impression while reading some papers of a certain reluctance by investigators to get down on the mud to look at prey behaviour - maybe an incorrect conclusion! One difference which does apparently separate American and European feeding studies is the seeming dependence of the former (with certain exceptions, such as Morrell et al and Hartwick & Blaylock, both working on oystercatcher species) on stomach analysis, whereas most current European studies combine or replace this, because of its serious biases especially when some prey are soft-bodied, with observational information on feeding birds, sometimes supplemented with analyses of faecal or regurgitated pellets (eg Goss-Custard).

The part of the world where most basic work still needs to be done on waders is probably the W Pacific and E Asia but the one paper from this area (Johnson) manages to deal with two aspects rather under-represented in the work from the more studied areas: the biology of summering non-breeders and the field assessment of estimated flight ranges.

Dr Pitelka, his colleagues and the sponsoring organisations are to be congratulated on bringing together such a useful and stimulating collection of papers. This is a book which serious wader-workers throughout the world should read and which, with its reasonable price, many will wish to purchase.

Michael W. Pienkowski

NB: UK readers may find it convenient to purchase through the Scottish Ornithologists' Club Bookshop (21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT): price £5.40 plus £0.54 postage & packing .