

A WADER EXPEDITION TO MAURITANIA

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From 10 January until 15 March 1980 we, the Netherlands Ornithological Mauritanian Expedition 1980, were working on waders in the Parc National du Banc d'Arguin, the famous tidal-area at the Sahara-coast of Mauritania. The main aims of our expedition were:

- a complete census of waders and other wetland-birds at the Banc d'Arguin.
- to obtain quantitative information on species composition and biomass of the macrobenthos of intertidal mudflats
- to obtain qualitative information on the food of waders and quantitative data on the feeding ecology of some species, as well as the activity patterns of waders
- to investigate the low-water distribution of waders in relation to food and feeding.

With the important help of both Mauritanian and French colleagues we were able to realize most of our goals. In this short note we give some preliminary results of our work.

Counts

Between 17 January and 5 March we were able to make a reasonably complete census of the area. Nearly all the sites were visited and birds counted, using binoculars and four 15x-60x zoom telescopes. Due to logistic and security problems we were not able to count the Baie d'Arguin and Cap Blanc, relatively small areas in the northern part of the Banc d'Arguin. The results of the wader-counts are summarized in the table.

As it turned out, the excitingly large numbers of waders found at the Banc d'Arguin during December 1978 and January 1979 (Trotignon 1979 and in prep.) were in general, equalled by our counts. Midwinter numbers of waders in north-west Africa seem to be higher than concluded by Prater (1976) after the autumn counts of the Oxford and Cambridge Mauritanian Expedition 1973 (Knight and Dick 1975).

Biomass and wader feeding

Our planned macrobenthos-program proved to be a bit optimistic. Mudsampling at the Banc d'Arguin is quite difficult, due to the high temperatures, the slow transport and abundant eelgrass and shell-fragments in the samples. However, a reasonable impression of the biomass (standing crop) of most sandbank- and mudflat-types was obtained. Preliminary figures suggest that biomass at the Banc d'Arguin is generally less than half of the mean biomass in the Waddensea intertidal areas (compared with data in Beukema 1976).

Information on the food and the activity patterns of most wader-species and on the feeding ecology of some species, (Bar-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover) were collected and are now being analysed.

We hope to produce a report with full results of the expedition as soon as reasonably possible.

Literature

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Table. Results of the wader-counts at the Banc d'Arguin (Mauritania) in January-March 1980 compared with earlier estimates of the wintering population at the Banc d'Arguin by Prater (1976).

		NQME 1980	Prater 1976
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher	9 176	3 000
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed plover	97 989	13 000
<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Kentish plover	17 380	3 000
<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Grey plover	23 350	3 500
<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Knot	366 396	130 000
<i>Calidris alba</i>	Sanderling	33 910	13 000
<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Little stint	43 214	5 000
<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Curlew sandpiper	173 467	38 000
<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Dunlin	818 042	180 000
<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Bar-tailed godwit	542 863	210 000
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Whimbrel	15 621	3 500
<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Curlew	14 176	2 500
<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Redshank	69 656	100 000
<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Greenshank	1 447	800
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Turnstone	17 080	10 000
Total		2 243 769	715 300