

REVIEW

The Status of Waders (Charadrii) and Other Birds in the Coastal Region of the Southern and Eastern Cape

by Underhill, L.G., Cooper, J. & Waltner, M. 1980. ISBN 0 620 04762 3. (248pp.)

Available from M. Waltner, 5 Montagu Way, Pinelands 7405, Cape Town, South Africa. Price R 4.00, inclusive of postage.

This is another in the splendid series of cyclostyles reports produced by the Western Cape Wader Study Group. It covers the 750 km of coast which lies between the Klein-Brak (near Mosell Bay) and Kei (near East London) estuaries in the Cape Province of South Africa. About two thirds of the coastline in this region consists of sandy shores, while the rest is a mixture of rocky shores and cliffs. These marine shores supported 8,990 waders (80% of them being Palaearctic migrants), the commonest species being Sanderling (4,899), Turnstone (1,220) and White-fronted Plover (1,139). The largest numbers of waders were, however, associated with the various estuaries, lagoons, salt pans and sewage works situated along this stretch of coast. The total number of waders in the latter types of habitat was 24,873 (90% of them being Palaearctic migrants), the commonest species being Curlew Sandpiper (7,702), Ruff (2,800) and Little Stint (2,632). All the counts were conducted in the middle of the austral summer of 1978/79 (December and January) at a time when the number of Palaearctic migrants should have been at a peak.

One of the most useful features of this report is that it includes a tremendous amount of detailed information about each individual site, including assessments of the present and future impact of tourism, angling and development etc. on the wading bird populations; as well as descriptions of habitat and census methods. The latter will be of particular value when monitoring population changes in the years to come. Counts of species other than waders are also included, the most abundant of these being Red-knobbed Coot (22,297; 67% of these occurring at Swartvlei - a large estuarine lagoon), Kelp Gull (4,890) and Black-necked Grebe (3,505).

It is surprising to learn what a tremendous impact man's activities have had on waders on this area - both favourable (e.g. the creation of salt pans) and unfavourable (e.g. tourism). Only about 10% of the birds counted were in protected reserves and the report ends with a plea for the conservation of the more important sites. Let us hope that the various local authorities and private landowners act on the specific recommendations which the report makes.

The Western Cape Wader Study Group have now completed counts of waders along the whole of the South African coast from the Orange River to East London, and also for two of the most important sections of the Namibian coast. They are to be congratulated for having undertaken such a massive task and will need no encouragement to publish an overall review of wader numbers in this area when the time is right. The detailed results are available in the following reports and publications.

Namibia

Underhill, L.G. & Whitelaw, D.A. 1977. An ornithological expedition to the Namib coast, summer 1976/77, Cyclostyled report, Western Cape Wader Study Group, Cape Town, 106 pp. (Copies still available).

Whitelaw, D.A., Underhill, L.G., Cooper, J. & Clinning, C.F. 1978. Waders (Charadrii) and other birds on the Namib Coast: counts and conservation priorities. Madoqua 11: 137-150.

South Africa

Summers, R.W., Pringle, J.S. & Cooper, J. 1976. The status of coastal waders in the south-western Cape, South Africa. Cyclostyled report, Western Cape Wader Study Group, Cape Town, 162 pp. (No longer available).

Cooper, J., Summers, R.W. & Pringle, J.S. 1976. Conservation of coastal habitats of waders in the south-western Cape, South Africa. Biol. Conserv. 10: 239-247.

Summers, R.W., Cooper, J. & Pringle, J.S. 1977. Distribution and numbers of coastal waders (Charadrii) in the south-western Cape, South Africa, summer 1975-76. Ostrich 48: 85-97.

With the results of the 1980 survey of the coast between the Orange River and the Olifants River, South Africa, not yet available, the Western Cape Wader Study Group have so far established that about a quarter of a million waders are present in the boreal winter between Durissa Bay and East London (87% of them being Palaearctic migrants). The most abundant species are Curlew Sandpiper (c. 86,000) and Sanderling (c. 46,000).

We now have quite comprehensive wader counts for south-west and north-west Africa, and these provide a powerful incentive to try and obtain some information from the many thousands of miles of coast which, from the point of view of waders at least, remain largely unexplored.

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