

News and notices

BOOK REVIEWS

BLOMDAHL A., BREIFE B. & HOLMSTRÖM N. 2003. *Flight identification of European Seabirds*. Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 0-7136-6020-1. Price £ 38,=, 374pp, ca 650 photographs, softback.

Since I heard that two of the authors of the Swedish *Sjöfågeln* were compiling an English and extended version, I have been eagerly waiting for the result. This spring, *Flight identification of European Seabirds* finally appeared. The main part of this book deals with the identification of flying seabirds that may be seen while seawatching from European shores. The authors use a broad definition of seabirds, ranging from divers to auks. They follow the species list in *BWP*, so you won't find a description of Cory's and Scopoli's Shearwater, nor Baltic Gull in this book. On the other hand, you will find descriptions of for instance Yellow-legged and Pontic Gulls in this book.

A short introduction and a chapter 'Basics of identification' are followed by the species accounts, which are divided into the following sections, depending on the species: size, silhouette, flight and flocking, plumage and bare parts, subspecies and geographical variation, voice, and note. Apart from a good description of size and silhouette, often in comparison with more common species, the authors describe plumage characters visible only at long range separately from characters that are visible under good viewing conditions.

Most species accounts are well-written with many years of seawatching experience shining through. It's a pity though, that the authors don't describe the differences under different viewing conditions in more detail, e.g. how to separate a Herring Gull from a Lesser Black-backed Gull when looking against the sun. Furthermore, they neither describe the colour morphs of Northern Fulmar nor how to separate Magnificent Frigatebird from the other frigatebirds. On the other hand, you will read how to separate Lesser from Greater Scaup, or Ring-necked Duck from Tufted Duck.

Every species account is completed with a fine selection of pictures, ranging from one for Red-billed Tropicbird to eleven for Arctic Skua, showing different sexes, ages and plumages. Atlantic Puffin is one of the exceptions; only summer plumage birds are shown, while winter plumage birds and juveniles would be more instructive for identification purposes. The several photographs illustrating differences between species at a glance are especially informative. It's a pity, however, that some pictures are slightly out of focus,

while others are a shade too blue. Although most captions provide extra information to the pictures, it's a riddle to me how you can age flying Little Auks or auks generally.

Despite the (minor) flaws I highly recommend this guide, not least for the sound advice: *"So do not worry about not being able to identify every bird - you are in good company. You are not an unskilled birder because of that, but rather a reliable birder with a clean conscience as you show that you are self-critical."*

Steve Geelhoed

WERNHAM, C., TOMS, M., MARCHANT, J., CLARK, J., SIRIWARDENA, G. & BAILLIE, S. (eds) 2002 *The Migration Atlas: the movements of the birds of Britain and Ireland*. T & AD Poyser, London. ISBN 0-7136-6514-9. 884 pp, more than 1000 maps. Price £55,=.

"In every sense, this book is a truly collaborative venture, and a magnificent tribute to all involved." In his foreword to *The Migration Atlas*, Ian Newton pays tribute to all those people involved in producing this fine and eagerly awaited book. Drawing on the mammoth BTO ringing dataset of more than half a million recoveries spanning nearly a whole century, and data from other historical and contemporary sources, *The Migration Atlas* provides the first comprehensive reference source detailing the seasonal movements of British and Irish birds.

The book is split into two sections: The first being a general introduction to bird migration, including five chapters on the methods of studying migration, the history of ringing in Britain and Ireland, the ecology of migration, how ringing data are analysed and interpreted, and finally a synthesis of data to investigate any broad patterns. The second section forms the bulk of the book and presents detailed accounts of 188 species movements and shorter accounts for 73 species. The combination of these two comprehensive sections makes this both an excellent textbook and reference guide.

The Atlas provides a coherent source of information detailing the small-scale and large-scale seasonal movements of each species shown in clearly presented maps. Novel data are presented suggesting that the migration routes and wintering areas of some species are not entirely as we thought. For example there is evidence to suggest that some Manx Shearwater individuals over-winter off the coast of France and the Iberian Peninsula rather than undertake trans-Atlantic or transequatorial migration. The maps show every data point, with ringing and recovery sites joined by a shortest distance straight line. For

common species there may be an argument for removing some of this detail as interpretation can become confusing. However, this has been addressed to some extent for those species that are very common with a wide British and Irish distribution such as the Great Cormorant and Black-headed Gull, with maps being split into distinct geographical regions, and movements presented separately, making interpretation much easier.

While much of the species accounts comprise maps and tables, the accompanying text, contributed by many of the leading ornithologists in Britain and Ireland, provides an excellent background to the historical and current distributions of each species. The expansion of the range of the Northern Fulmar is documented, and suggestions for spatio-temporal analyses to investigate potential changes in the geographical range of species such as the Northern Gannet, particularly in relation to climate change are proposed. Conservation issues are highlighted, such as the high mortality suffered by Roseate Terns possibly as a result of trapping at their wintering grounds in Ghana.

In addition to bird movements, the atlas shows how causes of recovery can be geographically distinct and provide an insight into the predominant anthropogenic activities in areas, with startling statistics such as 72% of Northern Gannet recoveries in the North Sea comprising oiled birds, while 69% of Northern Gannet recoveries in the open sea are birds accidentally caught in fishing gear or depredated by humans.

It is clear that for many pelagic seabird species there are gaps in our current knowledge, with the winter movements of as many as 50% of the 20 seabird and gull species studied, remaining unknown. With many species of seabird such as Northern Fulmar and Atlantic Puffin being almost exclusively ringed only in the breeding season at a small selection of remote colonies, the question of the origins of individuals observed at sea in British and Irish waters outside of the breeding season is highlighted and discussed. The authors' recognition of gaps in our knowledge, and methods of closing these gaps is one of the strengths of this book. For example, the authors suggest that remote sensing studies may be a good way of determining movement patterns of wide ranging seabird species such the Great Skua.

This accomplished Poyser publication, detailing the seasonal movements of British and Irish birds, builds on and complements previous work published in the two breeding bird atlases and the *Winter Atlas*. In compiling data from many sources to generate a comprehensive overview of species movements, the authors have produced an invaluable reference source for conservation scientists, policy-makers and ornithologists alike, and have provided a progressive way forward to understanding bird movements more fully.

Claire McSorley