

Book Reviews

ZOOLOGY

Amphibian Decline: An Integrated Analysis of Multiple Stressor Effects

Edited by Greg Linder, Sherry K. Krest, Donald W. Sparling.
2003. SETAC North America, 1010 North 12th Avenue,
Pensacola, Florida 32501-3367 USA. xxi + 345 pages.
U.S.\$98 Cloth.

This volume contains presentations at the Workshop on the Global Decline of Amphibian Populations sponsored jointly by the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) and The Johnson Foundation 1-23 August 2001 at Racine, Wisconsin. Fifteen papers are included as 10 chapters, one with A-B and another with A-E designations for no apparent reason.

Canadian data and perspective on the problem of declines are not neglected. Of the 35 contributing authors listed, 31 are from the United States but four are Canadian: Christine Bishop (Canadian Wildlife Service, Delta, British Columbia), David Cunningham ("freelance", Victoria, British Columbia), Martin Ouellet (Redpath Museum, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec), Bruce D. Pauli (Canadian Wildlife Service, Hull, Quebec). Ouellet is one of nine coauthors of Chapter 6 "Biotic Factors in Amphibian Population Declines", and Bishop, Cunningham, and Pauli are half of the six coauthors of Chapter 7 "Physical Habitat and Its Alteration: A Common Ground for Exposure to Environmental Stressors".

None of the individual chapters is a particularly easy read and their results or conclusions often are neither clear-cut nor universal in their application. However, collectively, they effectively and repeatedly bring out the complications in separating climatic, chemical pol-

lutant, and biotic pressures, many of which doubtlessly combine to produce documented or supposed losses or declines. The texts are heavily laden with flow and modelling in 18 figure diagrams, 18 tables, 5 matrices and even two "test boxes" to visually present concepts and consequences. Each chapter has its own bibliography.

The concluding summary chapter effectively stresses the continuing, unresolved nature of the problems, but, in an inevitable rather self-congratulatory manner, arrives at the conclusion that this workshop was vital to promoting a much-needed exchange of expertise on various aspects of real and potential amphibian declines and that it has created a network for further discussion and exchange. Although one could argue that this was happening anyway, the workshop did usefully focus discussions and the book spreads the state of knowledge. It is useful both for what research has been done and for what future approaches might be productive. One can hardly disagree with the fundamental conclusion that further sharing of information as it develops will be essential to adequately defining future measures. If, eventually, there ever will be effective conservation of the world amphibian fauna it will depend on a better understanding of the causes and reality of the declines.

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Birds of Africa: From Seabirds to Seed-eaters

By Chris and Tilde Stuart. 1999. MIT Press, Five Cambridge
Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. 176 pages. U.S.
\$29.95 Cloth.

This is an attractive book that appears to be intended as a typical "coffee table" volume. It is large in size (22 × 28 cm), profusely illustrated and very well laid out, with between 2 and 9 illustrations on each two-page spread. The plates themselves range from full page to quite tiny (under 4 cm²).

The text is presented in 12 chapters plus an introduction, species list, and index. Each chapter is devoted to a group of bird families with some feature in common. Thus we have "Birds of the Oceans", "Birds of Inland Waters and the Coastline", "LBJS", and so on. Chapters then deal with each family in turn (grouped

in the sequence of their common names), giving the number of species that occur in Africa together with a brief account of the family characteristics, and something about a sampling of the species. Occasionally there are boxes which treat a particular topic in some detail; for example, "The Dilemma of Island Birds".

The main body of the text enlivens the chronicle of numbers and species descriptions by concentrating on interesting anecdotes and "gee whiz" facts about the species under discussion. The authors are African and obviously have had considerable experience with the continent's bird life. On the whole their statements seem accurate, although I was unable to check some of them, but some are incorrect. For example, Great Skua does not breed in the Southern Hemisphere, Kelp

Gull is not an African endemic, and the Australian Ibis is not conspecific with the Sacred Ibis.

For me this book has some rather irritating problems that in sum seriously detract from its interest. Overall there is a lack of cohesion, mainly resulting from the organization of the text. The arbitrary chapter groupings inevitably run into families that do not quite fit the category, or fit into more than one. I would be inclined to place gulls and terns in the coastal waterbird chapter, lots of the "Seed-eaters" are classic LBJ's, and "Terrestrial Birds" results in a strange collection of species with Pittas following Ostrich. This is accentuated by the layout within the chapters, with (for example) "Avocets and Stilts" at the beginning of Chapter 3, "Oystercatchers" and "Plovers and lapwings" in the middle separated by Pelicans, and the "Waders or shorebirds" at the end. True, the systematic list at the end is in order, but this does little to balance the sense of randomness that one gets from the text itself.

Probably the authors would point out approaches of this kind are not unusual for books of the genre: they are not, after all, basic reference texts. Unfortunately, attractive though the layout is, there are problems with the plates as well. In many cases the tinier

illustrations are difficult to see properly, many of the poses are poor, and the selection of subjects pictured leaves something to be desired. Opening the book at random I find pp. 130-1 show two different pictures of Arrow-marked Babblers, one of the Southern Pied Babbler, and one of a Wallcreeper. The latter only occurs as a vagrant in North Africa, and the plate shows little of this species' remarkable wing pattern, so it simply looks like a gray bird. Africa does have a creeper species, and the text on these pages also includes the broadbills (Eurylaimidae). These species are not illustrated at all.

In summary, this book brings together a large number of photographs of African birds, some of them very good, together with a compilation of interesting facts and anecdotes on African bird families. My quarrels with content are really irrelevant if this is all you are looking for, or if you find this book attractive enough in itself to buy. Those who desire a thorough overview of the African avifauna should look elsewhere.

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The Firefly Encyclopedia of Birds

Edited by Christopher Perrins. 2003. Firefly Books Ltd., 3680 Victoria Park Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M2H 3K1 Canada. 656 pages. U.S.\$59.95.

Naturalists across the continent strive to ever increase their knowledge of local wildlife, and all love to hear about wildlife from other localities. Birdwatchers, for example, can become very knowledgeable about their local species, and the zealous ones will even study species from other areas within the same country, continent or even from around the world. But the vast array of bird species is overwhelming, and it takes a serious encyclopedia to pull them all together. Luckily for us, *The Firefly Encyclopedia of Birds* edited by Christopher Perrins is just what we needed – a good collection of text and photos of the birds of the world all in one volume. Nicely presented with tons of sharp photos illustrating everything from specific behaviours to simply jaw-dropping "coolness" (including several underwater pictures such as common murres on page 280-281, common kingfisher on page 368, and American dipper on page 521), the book is backed up by solid text summarizing well the basic tenets of ornithology. Moreover, each chapter

focuses on a bird family (the large number of species precludes a species-by-species analysis), and is accompanied by a "factfile". This sidebar summary provides a general description of size and habits, as well as a broad distribution map and my favorite, a visual comparison of bird size to a human.

The book also details several interesting specific behaviors, such as pigeon homing (pages 294-295), or the nest parasitism of Cuckoos (pages 316-317), but nothing on the degradation of the tundra by Snow Geese, a topic of high importance and actuality in North America. It also discusses extinct birds such as the Elephant Bird (page 21), the Dodo (page 291), and a short paragraph on the Passenger Pigeon (page 293). The book provides a fantastic introduction to birds from all around the world, is extremely well presented, very reasonably priced (\$75.00 CAN, hardbound), and constitutes a worthy, if not essential, addition to the library of all bird enthusiasts.

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