

News and Notes

This new section, 'News and Notes', is intended to provide a forum for up-to-date information on threatened species, on-going conservation work and other issues related to bird conservation. It will include pieces abstracted from other publications. Please send any contributions to BCI News and Notes Editor, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, or email them to Rob.Williams@birdlife.org.uk.

Inter-island movements by Seychelles Magpie-robins *Copsychus sechellarum*: attempts at re-colonisation?

The endemic birds of the granitic Seychelles islands are all forest species with fragmented distributions. Several widespread species have become extinct on at least one island as a result of colonisation and human activities that have transformed the natural environment of the islands. These include the introduction of alien species, habitat modification, persecution and pesticide use. The Seychelles Magpie-robin, the most critically threatened of the 11 endemic bird species in the granitic islands is no exception to this general rule. Prior to 1990, it had disappeared from seven of the eight islands where it historically occurred. The BirdLife Seychelles Magpie-robin Recovery Program initiated in 1990 has succeeded in increasing the population from 20 to 80 birds to date. The programme has included translocation of small founder populations to the predator-free islands of Aride, Cousin and Cousine, satellites of the second largest island in the Seychelles, Praslin. Between June 1997 and June 1999, 21 colour-ringed birds disappeared from Frégate, Cousin and Cousine, and most were presumed dead. However, three individuals are known to have dispersed up to 5km over-water to other islands. In November 1997, a young male from Cousin was found on Praslin and survived for at least a week, but subsequently disappeared and presumably died. In November 1998, a young female flew from Cousine to Cousin and successfully established a territory with a young

male but has not to date bred successfully. In April 1999 a young female flew from Cousine to Praslin and was subsequently successfully translocated to Cousin. Magpie-robins have been regularly reported on Praslin in recent years and it may be that birds which have been recorded as 'disappeared' have flown there, presumably to be killed by introduced predators such as cats and rats.

Dispersal movements in modern times by native bird species in Seychelles are not well known. Species such as the Seychelles Kestrel *Falco araea* and Seychelles Black Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone corvina* have been reported on islands where they had previously been present but had become extinct. In addition, Chinese Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* and Blue-pigeon *Alectroenas pulcherrima* have recently re-colonised Aride, the latter species also Cousin. These re-colonising species tend to have good powers of dispersal and occupy broad habitat niches. All of these events have occurred around Praslin and its satellite islands. Mahé and Silhouette, the two largest islands, are relatively isolated in comparison and colonisation events consequently less frequent. The Praslin island archipelago can thus be thought of as a large but fragmented landscape of small islands or habitat patches. With the populations of Magpie-robins on Cousin and Cousine increasing, it is likely that more colonising attempts will be made by this species (and perhaps others) to the greater Praslin archipelago and plans to manage this need to be instigated. More importantly, current plans to eradicate introduced predators from Seychelles islands and restore islands through BirdLife Seychelles' Avian Ecosystems Restoration Project,

should perhaps be focused on islands possessing large forest habitat areas within the Praslin archipelago. This would increase the chances of inter-island movements, such as has been recently recorded, which in turn might create a more viable long-term population.

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The breeding sites of the Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* have been discovered in Northern China

The threatened Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* is one of the most rare and endangered species of the world; nearly 600 individuals winter at sites around the South China Sea (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Guangxi and Hainan) and in Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The breeding sites have remained unknown, though it has been suspected that there must be a breeding population somewhere in northern China.

As a result of three years of expeditions searching for the species in northern China a small breeding population of the Black-faced Spoonbill has been discovered when two nests with eggs were found on a small island by Prof. Ding Wenning. Observations of breeding behaviour and searches for more nests are being carried out. This discovery has raised hope that other breeding sites may exist in the Changshan Islands of northern China.

The island also supports a breeding colony of the threatened Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*. Observed threats to the birds were collection of eggs and burning of vegetation on the island by local fishermen.

Ding Changqing and Ding Wenning plan to return to survey the islands again with the financial support of the Wild Bird Society of Japan and the Taiwan Wild Bird Information Center.

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New flocks of Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis* found in Colombia

Continuing searches for the Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis* in Colombia have resulted in the discovery of two new flocks totalling 61 birds. The flocks were found by fieldworker Bernabé López Lanús on 18 April 1999 in a remote valley of central Colombia. The species has recently been observed at just two localities (one in Colombia and one in Ecuador) with the world population thought to be less than 50 individuals and none known in captivity. Despite intensive conservation efforts the Ecuadorian flock vanished just over a year ago and the demise of the species seemed imminent. The discovery of the new population was followed by the discovery of an active nest with young. The fieldwork in Colombia is being undertaken as part of Proyecto Ognorhynchus which is funded by Loro Parque Fundación, Zoologische Gesellschaft/Fonds für Bedrohte Papageien and the American Bird Conservancy and supported in Colombia by Sociedad Antioqueña de Ornitología.

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Peak Count for White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* in Spain

On 15 January 1999 a census of White-headed Ducks *Oxyura leucocephala* coordinated by the Consejería de Medio Ambiente, Cordoba counted a total of 1453 individuals. They were distributed as follows: 820 in Andalucía, 13 in Castilla la Mancha, 617 in Valencia, 3 in Baleares.

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Eastern Sarus Crane wintering site found and protected

The threatened Eastern Sarus Crane has an estimated world population of less than 1,000 mostly in Cambodia and Vietnam with a few in Myanmar and Laos. The species was formerly common but has declined owing to hunting and habitat destruction. The whole population was thought to spend the dry season in the Mekong delta of Vietnam until last year when some 200 were discovered at the Ang Trapeang Thmar irrigation works in Banteay Meanchey province, 300 km northwest of Phnom Penh. The irrigation works was built with slave labour during the bloody 1970s Khmer Rouge rule and has now been designated a reserve for the cranes. The new reserve will encompass a wetland area of some 100,000 hectares (250,000 acres) to the north of the 21km (13 mile) earth dam.

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BOOK NOTICES

Gatherings of angels. Migrating birds and their ecology. K.P. Able (editor)
Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999. 193 pages, £22.95.

This book comprises eleven chapters, mainly relating to bird migration in the New World. The editor provides two general chapters on migration and a perceptive epilogue on the conservation of migrating birds. The other eight chapters consider passerines, raptors, cranes and waders. Included are descriptions of the 2000-mile non-stop flight of the tiny Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata* over the western Atlantic and the equally amazing 2500 mile non-stop flight of the White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* from Canada to South America. These are not reviews but essays, all

highly readable, by scientists clearly humbled by the subjects of their studies. A must for all migration enthusiasts. One can only hope that it may also be read by politicians and policy makers, for one factor in the long-term survival of these stunning creatures is the provision of refuges at key places on their migration routes.

Chris Mason

A guide to the birds of the West Indies. Raffaele, H., Wiley, J., Garrido, O., Keith, A. and Raffaele, J.
Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998. 511 pages, £35

This handbook provides information on all 594 bird species recorded in the West Indies including identification, voice, status and range (with maps), habitat preferences and breeding behaviour. Each species is beautifully illustrated including notable geographic variations where applicable. There are a number of full page paintings of outstanding quality, a fine example being the Puerto Rican Nightjar in flight after a moth.

The book differs from many standard field guides in including sections on biogeography and on conservation problems written by local experts. It's aim is to promote conservation with royalties to be channelled into environmental projects. If stimulus is needed to visit the West Indies, look no further than this volume.

Sheila Mason

Pittas of the World. Erritzoe, J. and Erritzoe, H.B.
Cambridge: The Lulworth Press. 240 pages, £30.

This monograph provides detailed accounts of all 30 species of Pitta, some of which are endangered. The birds are described, distribution maps are provided, there are accounts of recent records, of movements, habitats, behaviour, vocalisation, feeding, breeding, moulting and indeed many other aspects

of Pittas which one may need to know. There are over 1300 references, 32 colour plates and some black and white photographs. The text is terse, in the manner of *Birds of the Western Palearctic*, and the volume has a museumy flavour with notes on holdings of Pitta skins and skeletons accompanied by photos of sad, cotton-wool eyed specimens. However the book clearly represents a devoted effort by the authors and is surely a must for all Pitta enthusiasts.

Sheila Mason

Vanishing treasures of the Philippine Rainforest. Heaney, L.R. and Regaldo, J.C.
Chicago: The Field Museum. 88 pages, £19.25.

This slim paperback, crammed with colour photographs, could be treated as

a coffee table book but that degrades its serious purpose and stark message. The book explores the extraordinarily rich diversity of plants and animals found in the remaining Philippine rain forests, where at least 510 vertebrate species are to be found nowhere else. There are chapters explaining the biodiversity of the region followed by illustrated accounts of individual species (look out for the highly unamused Philippine Frogmouth) and the causes and effects of deforestation are discussed. Logging, a human population explosion, poverty and corruption have rapidly brought tragedy to habitats, wildlife and local people. The final chapter ponders the prospects for some recovery and, while for many species it is already too late, clearly the remaining irreplaceable treasures simply must be saved.

Sheila Mason