

Farmland Birds Across the World

Author: Herkert, James R.

Source: The Auk, 128(1) : 189

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1525/auk.2011.128.1.189>

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The Auk 128(1):189, 2011
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 Printed in USA.

Farmland Birds across the World.—Wouter van der Weijden, Paul Terwan, and Adriaan Guldemond, Eds. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. 144 pp. ISBN 9788496553637. Cloth, \$33.62.—Farmland is the world's largest habitat and holds a great diversity of birds—no less than 3,600 species. Yet a global review of the issues and bird life associated with this habitat has not been compiled. *Farmland Birds across the World* attempts to fill that void by providing a comprehensive review of the birds that inhabit farmland areas and the major issues that are associated with them. I found the book to be well organized and a very nice compilation of a broad range of information pertaining to birds in farmland areas.

The book acknowledges that the intensification of agriculture is a key threat to birdlife, while also pointing out that for some species, farmland may be their last resort on the planet (which the authors call the “first agriculture/biodiversity paradox”). Ironically, efforts to conserve these farmland-dependent birds often lead to efforts to reduce the productivity of the agricultural lands on which they depend, which can indirectly lead to pressure to

bring more natural lands into production (the second agriculture/biodiversity paradox).

Much has been written on the relationship between birds and farmland in various regions (especially Europe), but this is the first attempt to compile this information and present the issue at the global scale. The book begins with a chapter that includes discussions of the origin of farmland birds, the benefits provided to birds by farmland, the ecological benefits of birds to farming, the adverse effects of farming on birds, and a quantitative assessment of the importance of farmland for bird diversity. This section provides a nice background for subsequent chapters, which focus on important farmland habitats.

The grassland chapter covers a nice mix of areas, ranging from the African velds to the Eurasian steppe and northwestern European lowland grasslands, the North American prairies, the South American pampas, and the Australian rangelands. This chapter specifically highlights bustards, geese, and vultures—the latter because recent research has shown that certain species are extremely sensitive to some veterinary drugs used in the livestock industry. For example, numbers of White-rumped, Indian, Slender-billed, and Red-headed vultures have dropped by 98% on the Indian subcontinent, and all four are now considered endangered or critically endangered. Geese are highlighted because their success in grasslands has serious consequences in terms of competition for grass with livestock. Of the 15 true geese species worldwide, 8 cause substantial agricultural damage.

Other chapters cover arable land, rice fields, orchards, tree plantations, and forest gardens, coffee and cacao cultivation systems, and farmyards. All contain excellent overviews of the habitats and the birds found within them, including discussions of challenges and opportunities in each habitat. In all, the book discusses more than 500 species of farmland birds, 160 of which are pictured, providing a very broad overview of the subject.

Farmland Birds across the World aims at a wide audience—the conservation and farming communities, birdwatchers, the food industry, policy makers, and other people interested in sustainable farming, food, and birds, and I think they have met their mark. The pictures of birds and habitats are first-rate and could make the book of interest just as a coffee-table book, but there is much more within. Add the detailed case studies and examples, and there is enough here that even people who study farmland birds will learn something new. I recommend the book to anyone interested in farmland and the birds associated with this widespread habitat.—JAMES R. HERKERT, *Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Springfield, Illinois 62702, USA; e-mail: james.herkert@illinois.gov*