Book Reviews

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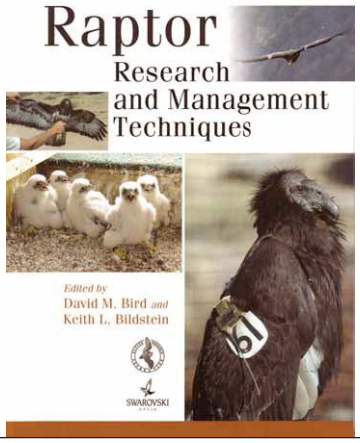
Bird D.M. & Bildstein K.L. (eds) 2007. Raptor research and management techniques. Hancock House Publishers, Surrey, B.C. ISBN 978-0-88839-639-6. Softback, 463 pp. $70.-



In 1987, the Raptor Information Center of the National Wildlife Federation produced a large tome in binder format on raptor research techniques. A reprint followed in 1993. For a long time, this was the only handbook available to raptorphiles, and as such in great demand. Meanwhile, several more raptor manuals have been published, including one in Dutch (Bijlsma 1997) and one based on experiences of European raptorphiles (Hardey et al. 2006). Interestingly, each manual has its distinct characteristics, and despite some overlap in coverage of the subject much can be gleaned from any one that is not to be found in the others. Raptors are easily the best-serviced bird group regarding study techniques. Compared with the European manuals, *Raptor Research* is distinctly professional in outline and scope. In Europe, thousands of amateurs study raptors, often alongside scientists, as visible in the plethora of raptor groups, raptor journals and papers. The opening chapter of *Raptor Research*, relating to the raptor literature, is testimony to the fact that raptor research outside Europe is mostly the prerogative of professionals. This is presumably also why chapters on systematics, energetics, physiology, pathology, toxicology and captive breeding are included, usually realms avoided by amateurs and deserving of specialist knowledge, labs, permits and money. I applaud the inclusion, however, not least because it may open avenues into other parts of raptor life not usually covered by fieldwork. Similarly, much attention is heaped upon study design, data management, analysis, presentation and survey techniques, unfortunately not always bothered about too much by amateurs. Although ABCs for professionals, for others it may well serve as an eye-opener for planning and executing research. Interestingly, no species-specific details are given for studying raptors, a subject extensively touched upon in European manuals including detailed age- and sex-specific growth parameters for nestlings. It merely shows that in the USA study design is more important than the species.

Field-study techniques cover a substantial part of the book, and much here is also covered by the European manuals. Nevertheless, the emphasis on study design is strong throughout these chapters (notably habitat sampling and behavioural studies). Not particularly useful for the average Dutch raptorphile, but certainly so for those working in mountainous regions, is the description of climbing techniques for cliffs. Also, capture, marking and spatial tracking (including use of stable isotopes and trace elements) techniques are covered in much more detail than in the European manuals. This is partly because it involves the use of sophisticated and expensive equipment. I think these are techniques in need to be applied on a larger scale in Europe than so far practised, providing data on movements, habitat use and survival not possible to obtain otherwise. Surely, many of these techniques are now so well developed, with prices of equipment much reduced, that they are within the grasp of amateurs or groups of volunteers. Here they may find a good start from where to proceed. A particularly useful,

and necessary, chapter describes the methods to reduce disturbance. It is indeed imperative to study the technical literature and consult specialists before embarking upon any study of raptors. For field-workers this is simply part of their basic training, and about which they are constantly reminded by fellow-raptorphiles. It therefore completely defies me why disturbance remains a never-ending dispute among nature managers (see for example, van den Boom & van Tooren 2008), or it must be ignorance. The last few chapters deal with mitigation (how to reduce losses from human activities), captive breeding (not something I want to promote anyway, but a big thing in the USA), how to augment wild populations and food resources, rehabilitation (a must for rehabilitation centres, but I am afraid few are willing to improve upon their own experience), public education (including raptor shows, not my cup of tea given the proliferation thereof in Europe, often exploited by ignoramuses), and legal considerations (which are likely to change the next time you take a breath).

All in all I consider this volume compulsory reading for raptorphiles, but especially for those from Europe who have very different backgrounds as to the study of raptors. Much they can learn from raptor enthusiasts working on the other side of the pond.

Bijlsma R.G. 1997. Handleiding veldonderzoek Roofvogels. KNNV Uitgeverij, Utrecht.

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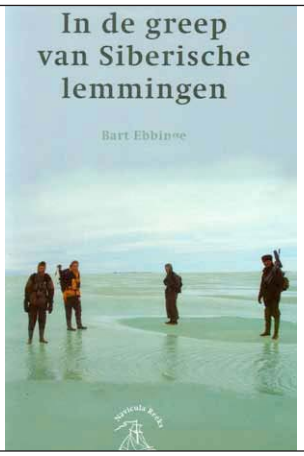
Ebbinge B. 2007. In de greep van Siberische lemmingen. KNNV Uitgeverij, Zeist. ISBN 978 90 5011 2673. Paperback, 160 pp. Euro 19.95



The Netherlands is a receptacle of Arctic birds during migration and in winter. Having attracted the attention of birdwatchers for decades, it lasted until the early 1990s before Dutch scientists were allowed to visit geese and waders in their breeding haunts in the Arctic. Especially Gerard Boere, then working for the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, was instrumental in bringing the Russian-Dutch cooperation to fruition (overview in Boere 2007). Although Taimyr had already been investigated in 1843 by A.F. Middendorff, and many more had followed in his footsteps (Iličev & Flint 1985), very little of this information had trickled into the west. This abruptly changed when the tundra became flooded with Dutch (and Russian and German) scientists and birdwatchers (Ebbinge et al. 2000). What these people exactly were doing there, was known to the happy few involved in the field studies, and those having access to reports and papers. It is therefore laudable to have a narrative documenting the expeditions to the Taimyr Peninsula in 2004 and 2005. Too often do scientists circle their own small world without taking the opportunity to regale the thrills and frills of research to a general public. What better chance than to do so for Arctic research on geese, waders, lemmings and what not, carried out in a near-pristine habitat far away

from the nearest human settlement. In this diary Bart Ebbinge and his team members explain their interest in waders, geese and the Arctic ecosystem, and their motives to study wild birds and mammals in their natural environment. The expeditions were carried out with the scientific motive to unravel intricate interplays between organisms and their environment (illustrated in species-specific detail, not so much in the greater scheme of research), but at the same time there can be no doubt that it is a never-ending joy and privilege to spend so much time in the Arctic. The inevitable moments of boredom and long waits in dreary Siberian towns only served to punctuate the wilderness of the tundra. The short Arctic breeding season makes for frantic work and few second chances, both for the birds and the researchers. Poor timing, or simply bad luck, can ruin the breeding season as well as the data collection. In this regard, I was encouraged to read the overriding sense of responsibility for the birds. Each decision, as where, when and how to capture birds, was routinely weighted against possible adverse effects on the birds. Also, it takes some flexibility to adjust the program according to the circumstances, or to jump on newly created opportunities not anticipated during planning (like a sudden upsurge in Least Weasels *Mustela nivalis*). This book provides many such examples. Reading this book left me wondering why not many more people are studying biology, surely the most exciting of sciences, or skip birding in favour of research.

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Ebbinge B., Mazourov Yu.L. & Tomkovich P.S. 2000. Heritage of the Russian Arctic. Research, conservation and international co-operation. Ecopros Publishers, Moscow.

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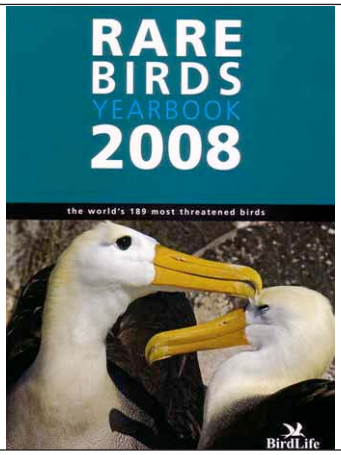
Hirschfeld E. (ed) 2007. Rare Birds Yearbook 2008. The World's 189 most threatened birds. MagDig Media Limited, Shrewsbury. www.rarebirdsyearbook.com. ISBN 978-09552607-3-5. Paperback, 273 pp. Euro 39.90



The honorary president of BirdLife International Princess Takamado mentions in her foreword of the Rare Birds Yearbook 2008 that in the past 30 years alone 21 bird species got extinct and that since the year 2000 three species disappeared from the wild, the Poo-uli *Melamprosops phaeosoma* from Hawaii, the Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* and the Hawaiian Crow *Corvus hawaiiensis*. This statement is not entirely in correspondence with the information of the 'Extinct Species since 1500' in the book. According to this overall picture, a total of 154 species have become extinct, but none between 1990 and 2007 and only 11 since 1970. But when has a species definitely become extinct? With the 189 species classified as 'critically endangered', 51 more compared with 7 years ago, several have not been recorded since a very long time. In spite of searches, there are no records of the Guadalupe Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma macrodactyla* since 1912. The last confirmed record of the Jamaica Petrel *Pterodroma caribbaea* is from 1879, in which year 22 birds were collected. The last record of the Cuban Kite *Chondrohierax wilsonii* was in 1962 and of the Glaucous Macaw *Anodorhynchus glaucus* in Brazil in the early 1960s.

Checking the list of 189 species, it looks as if conservationists do not accept that species have become extinct. So species like the Pink-headed Duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*, Crested Shelduck *Tadorna cristata* and Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis* are still registered as 'critically endangered' and not as extinct. Indeed, sometimes remarkable rediscoveries occur. The Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* from Andra Pradesh-India was assumed to be extinct until its rediscovery in 1986. Recently the same happened with the New Zealand Storm-petrel *Oceanites maorianus*, which was known only from three specimens collected in the 19th century. After the 'rediscovery' in 2003, this petrel is the cult-species of pelagic trips in the Hauraki Gulf, off the east coast of North Island, New Zealand. Other species are considered as critically endangered directly after the discovery. The splendid Araripe Manakin *Antilophia bokermanni* was described in 1998. After an extensive search in 2004–2006, the overall population was estimated at 800 individuals, occurring on a range of 28 km^2 facing many threats. The Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* is another species that after its recognition recently went straight on the critical list. So for this bird and for the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* Europe has a special responsibility.

The 189 bird species on the list include 6 owls, 3 albatrosses, 16 raptors, 10 hummingbirds, 17 parrots, 4 woodpeckers and 6 duck species. By far most of the endangered species have a population below 250. However, the present population of the Waved Albatross *Phoebastria irrorata* consists of no less than 34 964 (!) individuals and of the Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche eremita* 11 000. Because of serious threats, both species came on the list. The Waved Albatross has shown a 2–3% reduction in annual adult survival, a tremendous drop for a long-lived species.

The threats that make a bird critically endangered are generally known. But because of interactions between risks, it is not easy to pinpoint the exact reasons. BirdLife mentions that the arrival of a pregnant black rat from a ship to an island, the escape of a disease-bearing mosquito from a plane or a few days work by a couple of chainsaws may wipe out a species. And it still goes on. From 1970 onwards, cats were introduced to Socorro off Mexico, as far as known the principal breeding-island of Townsend's Shearwater *Puffinus auricularis*, which brought the Townsends to the list.

The 2008 Yearbook also documents projects that arrested declines and, in some cases, set species on the road to recovery. BirdLife indicates that between 1994 and 2004 16 bird species would have gone extinct without intensive conservation actions. Some projects got a lot of publicity. Between 1992 and 2003 154 California Condors *Gymnogyps californianus* were released in California, Arizona and also in Mexico, where the first chick for over 75 years was born in 2007. And maybe dark times are improving for the impressive Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferryi*. In 2004 the first release of a captive-bred bird took place and in 2005 the second one. Up till now the Philippine Eagle Foundation 'produced' 21 eaglets and the first steps are undertaken to recover habitat. As we can ask ourselves when a species has become definitely extinct, we may wonder when a species is safe. The colourful Gurney's Pitta is an example of unexpected luck. After the last record in Myanmar in 1914, the bird was rediscovered on a bird market in Bangkok in 1986. After research it turned out that few pairs survived in a small forest patch in Thailand. However, after the discovery of a new population in Myanmar in 2003, the number of birds is now estimated between 10 000 and 17 000.

BirdLife has recently launched a new initiative to save the 189 species. To make this a success, the organisation needs to raise GBP 19 million over the next five years. People who want to support this campaign, can do this by buying this book, because of each copy sold, GBP 4 goes straight to conservation. The one who does, gets a book with many photographs of the species involved and for every species the action plans to save them.

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