

Book Reviews

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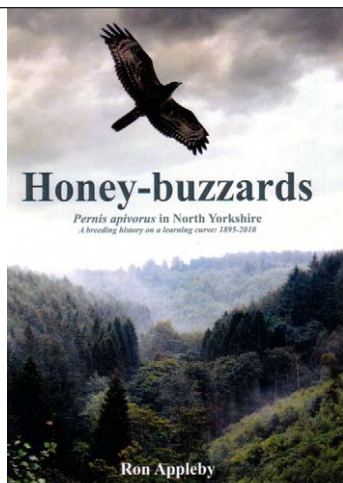
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Book reviews

Appleby R. 2012. European Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* in North Yorkshire (VC62). A breeding history on a learning curve: 1895–2010. Privately published, XII + 312 pp. Paperback. Price not known.



In the UK, the very small population of Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus* has triggered a long-lasting controversy among conservationists and birders: be reticent about nesting ('described in some quarters as obsessive secrecy'), or broadcast their breeding locations far and wide. Breeding in North Yorkshire was first suspected in 1976 by Henry O. Bunce (HOB), but a careful search in archives and the literature suggests that the species must have been breeding here since at least the late 19th century (when a 2-egg clutch was offered for sale). By 2002, it had become clear that the secret of breeding Honey-buzzards in Dalby, Wykeham and Langdale was a secret no longer. HOB therefore decided that publication of the data, collected since 1976 by a small band of local birders, would be alright. However, HOB died in 2009, before the envisaged publication had been completed. His friend and companion Ron Appleby finished the overview. The book essentially gives the raw data as written down in notebooks, day by day, year after year, hence the learning curve mentioned in the subtitle. Honey Buzzards, perhaps more so than other bird species, are difficult birds to study, not least because observed behaviours are hard to validate: what exactly does a June sighting tell us, is it a breeding bird, a non-breeding transient? How to prove that a bird is breeding, and where does it nest? Does not seeing fledglings prove that the breeding attempt failed? Or *vice versa*, what to think of juve-

niles suddenly turning up in August? And so on, *ad infinitum*. Every bird species, from the viewpoint of the observer, has its own learning curve, but the one for Honey Buzzards is particularly lengthy.

For readers and scientists living in the fast lane, the >300 pages with notebook text may be an obstacle, but the slow reader is well served with an abundance of interesting observations and poignant descriptions. Each year's observations are summarised at the end of the respective year-chapters, and at the end of the book the main results (males and females present, period of presence, juveniles seen or known to have fledged, nesting trees) are presented in a synopsis. The data seem to suggest that the local population is slightly increasing, a trend in contrast with much of mainland Europe. To appreciate the wealth of information, it might help to construct your own index whilst reading from cover to cover, because so many details regarding behaviour, individual life histories, moult, vocalisations, nest position, food and interactions with Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis* and other raptors may otherwise be hard to relocate. What makes the book particularly fun to read (for those with a romantic inclination) is the unabated dedication and enthusiasm that shines through. The birds are named and references are made to, for example, *Sporting interludes at Geneva* of Anthony Buxton (published in 1932, with a chapter on Honey Buzzards, 'being the story of Hubert and Maria'). This chapter led the Yorkshire bunch to characterize the landing of Honey Buzzards as 'doing the Buxton' or 'the Buxton Crash'. In the words of Buxton himself: 'swish, flop! and a whacking great hawk landed...'. Typical behaviours and plumages are succinctly defined by creative terms like: blink out (a distant bird in view, blink, then lost to view), flicker view, slide out, steaming (at incredible speed), sky dancing, whiffle action, bird with sunglasses (light morph juvenile with dark eye-mask), low-profile flyways, and so on. Anyone having observed Honey Buzzards immediately understands the meaning of these terms.

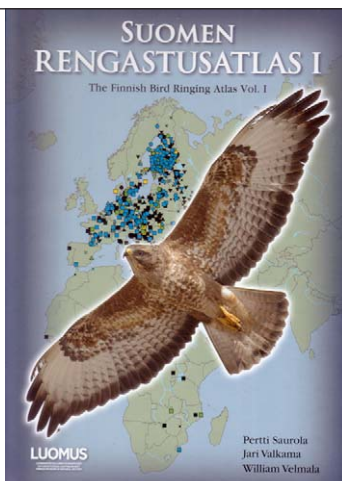
This labour of love, dedicated to the memory of Henry Bunce, is illustrated with many colour photographs of habitats and nest sites, and some line drawings. The Yorkshire bunch observed their birds from the ground only; no attempts were made to climb nesting trees, to measure and ring chicks, to collect food items on the nest, and so on. This self-restricted way of observing a difficult bird, in combination with a reticent attitude towards locating nests (fear of

disturbance), explains why the observers can claim to have recorded three fledglings at a nest in no less than three different years, a highly unlikely event which may occur once or twice in a lifetime with 10-20 nests per year under observation. The description of these events does not warrant the conclusion that the nest had indeed contained three chicks; in all cases, a third juvenile was recorded late in the post-fledging stage, but never seen on the nest during the nestling stage, indicating a 'stranger' that temporarily joined up with a local pair with fledglings. Other errors involve 'pieces of honey comb' (the one photographed clearly shows a wasp comb, as one would expect from Honey Buzzards), and moulted rectrices (the plates on pages 59 and 203 show primaries, both males indeed). These minor mistakes do not detract from the value of this compilation of records. In fact, the very nature of the publication permits re-interpretation of observations, based on the detailed descriptions and photographs supplied. A laudation in itself, and part of the never-ending learning curve.

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Saurola P., Valkama J. & Velmala W. 2012.

The Finnish Bird Ringing Atlas I. Finnish Museum of Natural History and Ministry of Environment, Helsinki. 549 pp. Hardback. EUR 51. Available via www.nhbs.com.



Migration atlases are now available for a number of countries, with multiple or single volumes for Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Finland is joining the Scandinavian club, with the first volume covering introductory chapters on bird ringing and species accounts of swans, geese, ducks, grouse, divers and grebes, herons, raptors, rails, waders and skuas. It may seem strange that each and every country is producing its own ringing atlas, bird migration being global after all, but upon closer inspection it is a blessing. For one, each country has its own ringing history, which not only makes for fascinating reading but is a tribute as well. No bird atlas is complete without a display of this groundwork. And what a parade of illustrious men it is (very few women, even today), starting with Johan Axel Palmén and Einari Merikallio, all the way up to raptorhile Pertti Saurola (head of the Ringing Centre from 1974 to 2001, a period of important transformations) and the latest guys on the block using sophisticated processing systems and new technologies of which Palmén could not have dreamt. As other ringing schemes, the Finnish one has known its ups and downs, but on the whole is a shining example of what small budgets and dedicated volunteers and professionals can achieve. Starting in 1913, the Finnish had ringed >10 million birds by late 2011, resulting in >1.1 million recoveries (for this atlas, only birds ringed in Finland have been analysed). The number of ringers increased from a few tens in the early days to some 700 nowadays. Another reason why country-based ringing atlases are a good idea is that the analyses can be presented in more detail than possible in an all-encompassing European atlas (which of course should be produced as well). The present atlas is a point in case. And finally, what better way to present ringing results to the general public and government, in an easily understandable format? The Finnish have used the program TISS designed by Anders Bignert of the Swedish Museum of Natural History to produce maps and circular statistics. This makes for direct comparison with the Swedish atlases, and is a visual feast even for the colour-blind.

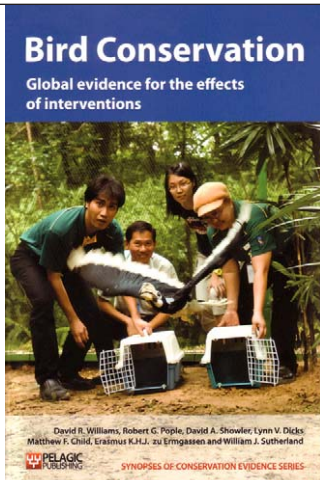
The species accounts follow a template, but vary enormously in length relative to the amount of information available. Basic statistics are summarised in a table, such as numbers ringed (and proportion nestlings) and recovered, recovery rate, recoveries abroad, ages of the three oldest individuals, longest distances covered (again for three individuals), eastern- and westernmost recoveries, and fastest autumn migration. Annual ringing totals, subdivided in nestlings and full-grown birds, are graphically and spatially shown and explained, the latter especially important where politics

or individuals were responsible for outliers. The geographical distribution and timing of recoveries are shown with several maps, diagrams and graphs, describing migratory pathways in spring and autumn, breeding and wintering areas, ringing sites and annual cycle (timing of movements against latitude). Whenever possible, age and sex differences in migratory strategies are dealt with. Finding conditions, causes of death and temporal changes in recovery rates (separately for birds killed) are shown in graphs. As found in many other European countries, the reporting rate of Finnish ringed birds has been steadily declining since the 1960s, not only of birds killed intentionally but also of birds reported dead by the public. The latter is quite surprising, as the education level has improved in Europe and Africa, ringing as a research activity is now well known across Europe and reporting has become easier than ever (via websites). It is hardly conceivable that the interest in birds/nature is dwindling among citizens, or is urbanization taking its toll?

The bulk of this first atlas is about waterbirds, raptors and waders, bird groups 'basking' in the interest of above-average dedicated ringers and researchers. The species accounts are lengthy, some even covering 14–17 pages (*Haliaeetus albicilla*, *Accipiter gentilis*, *A. nisus*). For several species, results from satellite tracking (*Pandion haliaetus*, *Grus grus*), neck-banding (*Cygnus cygnus*) or colour-ringing (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) are shown in addition to the ringing results. The extensive English summaries and English-captioned tables and figures serve the non-Finnish reader well. The frequent references to ringing results in other Nordic countries are of importance, especially because for many species Finland embodies the migratory divide (SW or SE, or in-between) in European migratory birds. At the same time, the Nordic countries are living proof of migratory connectivity between breeding and wintering sites, with birds in general following N(E)–S(W) pathways such that birds from Norway or Sweden end up in more westerly wintering areas than those from Finland. This is clearly demonstrated by long-distance migrants like *Pernis apivorus*, *Circus aeruginosus*, *Buteo buteo vulpinus*, *Pandion haliaetus*, *Falco tinnunculus*, *F. subbuteo*, *Grus grus* (for which loop migration is demonstrated via satellite telemetry) and *Xenus cinereus*, to name a few. Finland being the country where *B.b. buteo* and *B.b. vulpinus* co-occur, the results for this species are particularly intriguing. The long-distance migrant *vulpinus* is supposed to breed in northern, central and eastern Finland, with a zone of overlap with nominate *buteo* in the lake district of southern Finland (and apparently: mixed breeding,

given the long natal dispersal distances of both subspecies). For at least two decades, the population has been decreasing with 2% per year. *Vulpinus* starts migrating earlier than *buteo*, with adults ahead of juveniles, and fly all the way to eastern and southern Africa. Of ten winter recoveries east of the Black Sea, nine were of adults, suggesting that (some) older birds stay to winter in Europe, rather than migrating to Africa (were they of mixed parentage, or is it a long-term change in behaviour?). Interestingly, the ringing results seem to indicate that *vulpinus* remain in Africa during their first year of life, like *Pernis apivorus*. This is just one example of how detailed the recoveries have been analysed. Ringing atlases are endless sources of wonder, not so much because of spectacular 'outliers' (of which there are many), but because large-scale patterns emerge or are suggested by the – often sparse or ambivalent – data. The introduction of novel techniques like telemetry, dataloggers, light-sensitive devices and stable isotopes enables fine-tuning of coarse results obtained via mass ringing. Individual performances as validation of larger patterns, what better complements do we need, what better proof to convince ringers and governments to continue systematic bird ringing? The Finnish ringing atlas embodies all these facets, and tops it off with a splendid lay-out (by Harri Sulonen), numerous illustrations (by Dick Forsman), telling photographs and appendices showing numbers ringed (of all species, not just the ones covered in the first volume), and recoveries per country separately for Europe, Africa, Asia and other continents (with % killed, being a particularly high proportion in Denmark, France and southern European countries). Perhaps an idea to follow the Nordic format in other European countries that are contemplating the production of a ringing atlas of their own? (RGB)

Williams D.R., Pople R.G., Showler D.A., Dicks L.V., Child M.F., zu Ermgassen E.K.H. & Sutherland W.J. 2013. *Bird Conservation: Global evidence for the effects of interventions*. Pelagic Publishing, Exeter. Paperback, XVI + 575 pp. ISBN 978-907807-19-0. Euro 39,99 (or free download via www.conservationevidence.com).



This is a hugely important book. Despite having become a worldwide business with more jobs and money involved than ever before, bird conservation is not as effective as it could be. Of course, the momentum of counterforces is enormous. But it cannot be denied that decision-makers are often ignorant of scientific evidence regarding effects of interventions on bird populations, either on purpose (what you don't know, cannot get in the way) or for a variety of other reasons ('no time to read', not able to read 'difficult' papers, no access to databases, preferring 'experience' to science, incompetence...). This book is a big step to facilitate the bird conservationist, not least because a free download of the book is possible. The idea behind the synopsis is simple: compile scientific evidence on the effects of interventions to bird conservation, describe methods and assess (but not weight) quality of evidence and provide 'key messages' (rapid overview of evidence). The authors checked 15 specialist ornithological journals (listed) and 20 general conservation journals (not listed), apparently only when published in English and when peer-reviewed. All references are summarised in more detail on the ConservationEvidence website. Main subjects in the present synopsis are about habitat protection, education and awareness raising, residential and commercial development (de facto: angle windows to reduce collisions and mark or tint windows to reduce mortality), agriculture (separately for general, arable and livestock farming; a separate synopsis on

Farmland Conservation is in the making), wind turbines, roads and powerlines, fisheries (for example: bycatches), exploitation, human disturbance, harvesting/logging/management, habitat restoration and creation, invasive alien and other problematical species, predation, responses to small/declining populations (like rehabilitation, food supplementation, fostering and translocations), and captive breeding, rearing and releases.

For the average conservationist, i.e. one not having access to the scientific literature, this book represents a *Fundgrube* that may significantly improve the quality of decision-making. Very few issues pertaining bird conservation in The Netherlands so far were based on a science-based decision as published in peer-reviewed journals, be it meadow bird protection, grazing regimes, eradication of alien species, 'war against geese', predator control, windturbines, providing artificial nests (Peregrines), rehabilitation, use of decoys to attract White Storks to newly erected nests, translocation of Black Grouse from Sweden to The Netherlands (to increase genetic variation), reintroducing Black Grouse with captive-bred birds in unsuitable habitat or relocating Goshawks (to 'save' Black Grouse from predation). The list is endless, the disregard for science quite amazing. The section on the impact of human disturbance on birds (and nature in general) is most relevant in a Dutch setting, as nature conservation bodies systematically refuse to look at the scientific evidence, yet indiscriminately propagate ever more and diverse human activities in nature reserves. To avoid the obvious escape route for unwilling/lazy decision-makers ('book written in English'), the book should be translated in Dutch as soon as possible and made available free of charge, preferably also on the internet. Perhaps it can be expanded with some more Dutch evidence, as the present synopsis is rather British-biased for European problems. For example, meadow bird research has a long tradition in The Netherlands, but little has been published in the journals used for *Bird Conservation* (of course, I am not referring to the proliferation of reports in Dutch; as in Williams *et al.*, studies have to be published in scientific journals and books, but language should not be a decisive factor of their use). All in all, the book is a must on the shelves of anyone involved in birds. It is incredible value for (no) money. Even better: anyone knowing of evidence not included in the synopsis, is invited to contact the authors via www.conservationevidence.com. Following guidelines on the site, you can submit new evidence via a paper or provide a summary of a previously published study. Ongoing projects, these synopses. (RGB)