

ATLAS OF THE BREEDING BIRDS OF ARABIA

Michael C. Jennings. *Fauna of Arabia, Vol. 25, 2010; hbk, 772pp, 106 colour photos, numerous figures and maps; ISBN 978-3-929907-83-4 £102.00* - Reviewed by Tom Bailey

In 1984, Michael Jennings embarked on an ambitious project called the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia Project (ABBA) to collect information on the status and distribution of Arabian breeding birds. Twenty six years later, the results of his determination and the hard work of all those who have contributed observations, data and knowledge to the project are published in this volume. This is a labour of love. I enjoyed reading the Author's Preface and learning a little more about the personnel journey that Mike Jennings has taken since his arrival in Arabia in 1969. Also worth reading in the Preface is a discourse on the contribution made by Richard Meinertzhagen, author of 'Birds of Arabia' whose reputation has been questioned in recent years.

This is a beautifully produced volume that is well illustrated with line drawings and maps that accompany each species account. A generous number of first rate colour photographs, many by the well known bird photographers Hans and Jens Eriksen make this an easy book to 'leaf' through.

Chapter 1 covers aspects of Arabian ornithology including endemism, nomadism, exotic birds, reintroductions and extermination campaigns. Chapter 2 discusses factors affecting bird distribution in Arabia including climate and altitude, geology and topography, vegetation and habitat change and man-made habitat change. Chapter 3 reviews regional bird communities, with Arabia being divided into ten avifaunal regions based on habitat types, topographical features and zoogeographic influences. In Chapter 4, conservation issues are examined, including human exploitation, habitat change, farming, pollution, hunting and introduced species. This chapter concludes with a review of the conservation needs of Arabian countries and summarises some of the actions being taken across the region.

The bulk of the book is concerned with species accounts covering the 273 species that have been proven to breed within the Arabian Peninsula (including Socotra). These are well researched and references, where available, are up to date. Most species accounts comprise 2 pages, but are longer for some species, such as the sooty falcon (*Falco concolor*) where discrepancies in population estimates exist. In the case of the sooty falcon while Del Hoyo (2009) gave a population estimate of 40,000 pairs, Jennings has reviewed what is known about this bird and estimates the population has



declined and may be as low as 1,000 pairs. The value of the thorough research by Jennings and his team has ensured that species like the sooty falcon have had their conservation status in the IUCN Red List amended.

At over 750 pages long this is a mine of useful and interesting information for anyone wanting to know more about the avifauna of Arabia.

Biologists, biology teachers and students, conservationists, anyone involved in wildlife management and especially anyone interested in birds will find this volume valuable.



The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund was initially announced at the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona in October 2008, and was established in the form of an endowment through a donation by Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. The Fund has been accepting applications since mid-March 2009 for grants of up to \$5000 and between \$5000 and \$25,000.

The Fund was established on the basis that in the broader environmental debate, direct species conservation has lost out to wider issues such as climate change, sustainability, poverty alleviation etc., as it is now seen as a by-product of larger issues. This has led to fewer resources going to support direct species conservation, resulting in under-funded field biologists, wardens and conservationists, as well as leading to a loss of expertise and experience in this field; all to the detriment of global biodiversity.

It is the objective of the Fund to work towards a well-supported community of conservationists and experts, helping to re-affirm the importance of species conservation as a discipline and encouraging direct species conservation in the field. The Fund aims to achieve this by providing grants to dedicated individuals and organizations who genuinely make a difference in the field, to in situ

conservation work which really helps a species. The Fund would support projects on species which are endangered (generally according to the IUCN/SSC Red List), data deficient, or locally important, covering work such as surveying, direct conservation action, scientific research and local awareness.

The grants will be awarded to individuals and organizations who will actually improve the long-term survival chances in the field of a given species. This is on a genuinely global level, including any animal, plant or fungus species.

For more information about the Fund, and to apply, please go to the Fund's website at www.mbzspeciesconservation.org, or write to the Fund Manager at nicolas.heard@mbzspeciesconservation.org. It is intended that as the number of projects the Fund supports increases, the website will also become a forum for species conservationists and a site on which grantees can highlight the work they have done.