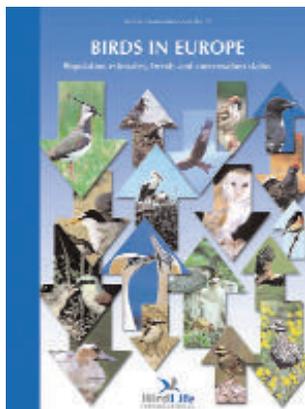


# Reviews

## BIRDS IN EUROPE: POPULATION ESTIMATES, TRENDS AND CONSERVATION STATUS

Compiled by Ian Burfield and Frans van Bommel. BirdLife International, Cambridge, 2004. 374 pages; maps, tables, figures, line-drawings. ISBN 0-946888-53-1. Hardback, £30.00.

This is a revision of a book first published ten years ago (see *Brit. Birds* 88: 619), the first-ever review of the conservation status of all wild birds in Europe. The original (*BiE1*) became a cornerstone for conservationists and policy-makers, and was widely lauded. Chris Harbard called it 'monumental' in his review in *BB*. I confess that I do not possess a copy of the original (which was an oversight on my part), but monumental is also a suitable adjective for the new volume (*BiE2*). All 524 species which occur regularly in Europe are covered, with the standard treatment being half a page for each (the book is A4-sized). This includes a distribution map,



with arrows to show population trends in each country; more detailed data on population size and trends (both breeding and wintering, where available) in tabular form; bar graphs to illustrate data quality; and a concise summary of each species' conservation status. The information is bang up to date; for example, all the *Seabird 2000* data are included for UK seabirds. The coverage is genuinely continent-wide, from Greenland to the Urals, from Svalbard to the Canaries; greater political stability in the Balkans and the Caucasus has allowed data from all European countries to be brought

together for the first time. Although there is a frightening amount of information packed into each species account, the layout is generally clear and the explanation of how to interpret the symbols, abbreviations and so on is good – you can cut to the chase quickly if you are in a hurry.

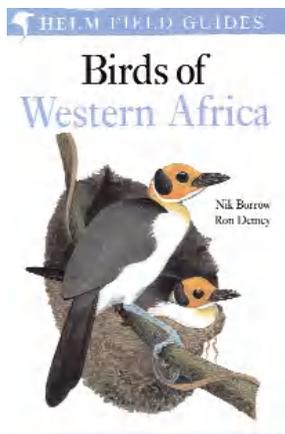
Harbard was depressed by reading *BiE1* and, ten years on, the overall theme is one of even greater concern: 'Birds in Europe continue to be threatened by widespread environmental change, and many populations are now in deeper trouble than a decade ago.' Almost 43% (226) of the species analysed now have an Unfavourable conservation status, and arguably the most worrying of all the many statistics presented is that the status of 45 species moved from Favourable to Unfavourable during 1990-2000; a mere 14 showed the reverse trend. This is not just a book for scientists, statisticians and doom-sayers though, the subject matter affects all of us and it deserves a wide audience. Highly recommended.

Roger Riddington

## FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF WESTERN AFRICA

Nik Borrow and Ron Demey. Christopher Helm/A&C Black, London, 2004. 511 pages; 148 colour plates; 1,304 maps. ISBN 0-7136-6692-7. Paperback, £29.99.

This much-anticipated volume combines the plates and maps from the highly acclaimed *Birds of Western Africa* by the same authors (see *Brit. Birds* 95: 404) into a single pocket-sized field guide covering the 1,304 species recorded within the 23 nations comprising West Africa. Many of the 148



colour plates are taken from the earlier work, although ten are entirely new and others have been reworked to include additional

species. Some of these, including Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* and Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, are new to the region, while others, such as Iberian Chiffchaff *P. ibericus*, appear as the result of a recent split. Names generally follow those used in *Birds of Africa* (*BoA*) and, consequently, several have changed since publication of the earlier volume, bringing them into line with those used in *BoA* Vol. 7.

Colour reproduction in the review copy is quite good, particularly on the warbler plates, and certainly better than on the corresponding plates in *Birds of Western Africa*, where colours often appear too rich and intense. The maps are relatively large for a guide of this

size, and should be fairly accurate, since earlier errors have been corrected and range changes and extralimital records up to March 2004 included. Descriptive text is minimal: restricted to an outline narrative discussing only the most salient plumage characters, habitat preferences and vocalisations, and limited to a maximum of six lines per species. The inclusion of the track number on the 15-CD set *African Bird Sounds* by Chappuis (2000) provides an invaluable reference, and really renders the inclusion of call descriptions largely irrelevant.

How does this book compare with the only other modern field guide to this region: *A Field Guide to Birds of The Gambia and Senegal* by Barlow, Wachter & Disley (1997)?

The geographical coverage here is clearly greater, so for most countries there is no contest. But if travelling within these two popular birding countries, which is the better guide to travel with? The plates in Borrow & Demey are certainly superior, and with the text accompanying each plate, it is often quicker and easier to use than Barlow *et al.* With so many species included that do not occur in The Gambia and Senegal, the distribution maps are essential. These have been conveniently placed within two pages of each plate, and are sufficiently large, detailed and accurate to enable users to establish at a glance whether they are in the range of a particular species. Although the text is more expansive in Barlow *et al.*, it is not necessarily more detailed. So

given a choice, I would opt for this guide as it covers the entire region, but carry either Barlow *et al.* for alternative images, or the earlier 2001 guide for a more detailed discussion.

What are the drawbacks? My only concern, albeit one which I have not yet had the opportunity to put to the test, is the sturdiness of the binding. Unlike Barlow *et al.*, this field guide is available only in paperback format, and personal experience of several Helm guides put into regular service in India suggests that they lack the robust construction needed for daily use. This book appears no different, so its lifetime, if used heavily, may be limited.

Peter Kennerley

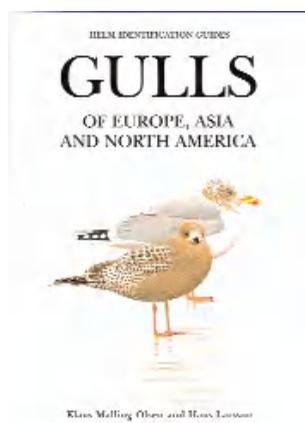
#### GULLS OF EUROPE, ASIA AND NORTH AMERICA

By Klaus Malling Olsen and  
Hans Larsson. 608 pages; 83  
full-page colour plates; 823  
colour photographs;  
distribution maps; tables.

Christopher Helm, A&C Black,  
London, 2003. ISBN 0-7136-  
7087-8. Hardback, £45.00.

Watching gulls is something of an obsession of mine. Gulls are like that – the more you learn, the more you want to learn (or realise that you don't know). Being 'good' comes with practice (I would call myself a 'trier'), but that requires effort: effort to find the 'right' place (municipal dumps, pig fields and reservoirs, both at home and abroad) and to go at the right time; effort to store the information you glean from such observations, via notes, video, digiscoped images and simple mental experience (new aspects crop up constantly to add to your knowledge and experience of the variability of gulls); and effort is also needed to find the right place to look for help.

I have learned much from friends, but also from the internet,



which has been responsible for much of the recent dissemination of information. There are some seminal articles in magazines (you should see my well-thumbed and dog-eared copies of Lars Jonsson's articles on Yellow-legged Gulls in *Alula* and on Baltic Lesser Black-backed Gulls in *Birding World*), but there has been a relative paucity of books 'spreading the word'. Peter Grant's *Gulls: a guide to identification* (Poyser, 1982, revised in 1986) has been the gull-watcher's bible for a long time but, no matter how great it was, things have moved on and it no longer has all that the ardent 'laridophile' needs or wants. Modern skills have moved on: we

now travel more; we have better optics to appreciate plumage subtleties; taxonomy has made great strides (even if there is still some way to go); and, not least, gull populations and distributions are dynamic.

But now we have this exciting book from the same pair of authors who brought us *Terns of Europe and North America* (Christopher Helm, 1985). I have always thought that it takes a brave author to try to put into words how to identify gulls. As many gull-watchers know, each observer looks at gulls slightly differently, and concentrates on slightly different aspects to identify them. It is so hard to be concise, hard to include every variation without confusing the reader, and it is difficult to avoid using generalisations ('often', 'frequently' or 'sometimes' are overworked when talking about gulls). If you publish something, you must be prepared to hear an opposing point of view, or expect to open yourself up to criticism. Does this book open up the mystery of gull-watching to a wider audience? Does it satisfy the 'experts'? Does it enthuse others who are merely confused when confronted by a group of roosting gulls at their local estuary?

In the Introduction, I was keen to see what advice is given on how to start watching gulls, and to get some idea of the personal processes by which the authors identify gulls. I wanted a little insight into what a gull-watcher should concentrate on first: age? structure? plumage tone? jizz?; in reality, the answer is 'yes' to all of these. But, apart from the brief preface, which describes some of the excitement of a moment's enlightenment, there are few personal touches in the introductory pages – perhaps a reaction to the concern about criticism? Instead, there are informative sections covering taxonomic decisions (such as treating American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* as a separate species from European Herring Gull *L. argentatus*); the format of the species accounts; the ageing of gulls and age terminology; judging size, jizz, plumage tones and hues; judging photographs; and gull topography. The Kodak Grey Scale, useful when determining the tone of the upperparts, is mentioned briefly (and might usefully have been included) but compensation comes in the form of some lovely paintings that show the comparative plumage tones of large gulls in non-breeding adult plumage. In addition, there are seven pages illustrating the wing-tip patterns of large-gull taxa and the variations existing within them.

The individual species accounts form the bulk of the book, and to assess these, I turned to those species with which I am more familiar (Caspian *L. cachinnans*, Yellow-legged *L. michahellis* and Common Gull *L. canus*). Each species account contains text on the identification of all age-groups, followed by sections on voice, moult, description (including further details on the features of the nominate form), geographical variation (describing the various subspecies in detail), distribution and migration (including clear and colourful maps), and measurements. Also included is a brief

summary on a coloured background, highlighting the key identification features; personally, I rarely even looked at this section. Within the text there are pages of Hans Larsson's wonderful paintings, showing standing and flight views of 'typical' plumage stages of the various forms within the taxon; pointers to the key features are placed opposite. Finally, each species account ends with a series of photographs covering all ages and subspecies, with brief captions revealing the key features shown in them.

In the case of Caspian Gull there are 32 highly enjoyable pages, though I did at times find the separate sections on 'identification' and 'description' a touch repetitive. The initial two or three paragraphs summarise beautifully the distinctive character of this lovely gull. 'With experience, jizz (and call) offers the best basis for identification. Caspian is typically lanky with curiously small head, slender body and long, slender legs – these structural differences are most marked in first-years. Although the size of Herring and Yellow-legged Gulls, it appears lighter and slenderer with a smaller, pear-shaped head, long, sloping forehead, angled hindneck and long neck... Breast often surprisingly protruding in relaxed birds; body slender with flat back lacking clear tertial step and flat belly... Large males may look like narrow-billed and slender Pallas's [Great Black-headed] Gulls, small females like over-sized Slender-billed Gulls.'

Though the text is concise, it is well edited and reads easily, and I found that I related well to the way in which KMO has described the species. It is, at times, generalised and we are warned of the possibility of variation causing problems, but I still found the detail more than adequate for the identification of Caspian and its separation from Yellow-legged and Herring Gulls. The inclusion of the forms *barabensis* (Steppe Gull) and

*mongolicus* (Mongolian Gull) within Caspian Gull will be contentious, but the author is fully aware of this and summarises the possible taxonomic affiliations of both forms – the former with Heuglin's Gull *L. heuglini* and the latter with Vega Gull *L. vegae*. Nonetheless, I suspect that we still have more to learn about the various taxa involved. The photographs are well chosen and largely excellent (though I am not questioning its identity, I did find plate 438 noteworthy for the bird's similarity to eastern *michahellis*). Yellow-legged Gull has 22 pages and I found its account to be equally impressive, with good treatment of *atlantis* in particular.

Over the winter, I used the account of Common Gull regularly. Common Gull is treated as separate from the North American *brachyrhynchus* (Mew Gull), and the account includes *heinei* and *kamtschatschensis*. Again, I found the text, illustrations and photographs extremely informative, but was a little concerned with the generalisations about the comparison of the size of the three forms. Size is subjective, and perhaps rather too much is made of *kamtschatschensis* being larger. It is bigger, but would it really stand out amongst a mixed group of *canus/heinei*? There is also no mention of the 'thayeri'-type wing pattern that is seen rarely in some adult Common Gulls; but these are niggly comments about something that is good in lots of ways.

This book is the new bible for those interested in gulls. It will add to the pleasure of those previously hooked, while it will provide others with the means to help them identify gulls during casual birding. Some of the text is hard reading, but it contains invaluable detail. It is a brave undertaking, but I for one am grateful to the author and the artist for their superb efforts.

*Brian Small*

BirdLife Conservation Series No 12. Title: Birds in Europe: Population Estimates, Trends and Conservation Status. Description: BirdLife International (2004). BirdLife Conservation Series No 12. URL: [http://www.birdlife.net/action/science/species/birds\\_in\\_europe/index.html](http://www.birdlife.net/action/science/species/birds_in_europe/index.html). Permalinks. Permalink to this version. For references, please go to <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/species-diversity/birds-in-europe-population-estimates> or scan the QR code. PDF generated on 09 Jun 2019, 08:21 PM. Data and maps. Menu. Global search. Effective bird conservation requires knowledge of distribution, relative abundance, and population trends at multiple geographic scales. Obtaining this information for a continental avifauna poses considerable challenges, especially in Europe with its 52 countries, numerous languages and cultures, and disparate resources available for monitoring bird populations within each country. Synthesizing the available information on the status and trends of all European birds into a single volume is an enormous yet essential task necessary to direct bird conservation activities across the continent. Public Comments. Review of: Birds in Europe: Population Estimates, Trends and Conservation Status. BirdLife International. 2004. BirdLife Conservation Series, no. 12. Birds in Europe book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. Presenting a review of bird conservation, this book covers the European continent. Start by marking "Birds in Europe: Population Estimates, Trends and Conservation Status (Birdlife Conservation Series, #12)" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving list. Want to Read.