North American Bird Bander

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The Migration of Knots. Edited by Theunis Piersma and Nick Davidson. 1992. Wader Study Group Bulletin 64, supplement. 209 pp. Free to members of the Wader Study Group; £5.00 to others (available from Wader Study Group, Box 243, Tring, Herts HP23 5SN, United Kingdom).

This supplement is essentially the published proceedings of a symposium held in Denmark in 1989, but several contributions have been updated to incorporate data gathered during the intervening years and a few contributions have been added to fill in gaps. Although based almost entirely on the Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*), the findings presented should be of interest to all students of bird migration.

The book consists of 30 contributions, organized into six sections. The opening section includes a one-page foreword and five-page introduction. In his foreword, W.J.A. Dick outlines how cannon-netting in Europe in the late 1960s led to greater interest in Red Knots, when European-wintering birds were found to breed not only in Eurasia, but also in North America, resulting eventually in nearly world-wide banding studies to sort out the complex migration system of this wide-spread species. The introduction, by the editors, provides a brief summary of what is known to date and what needs further research. The remaining sections cover "origins and distribution of subspecies" (four chapters), "migration systems reviews" (four chapters), "*islandica* knots in spring and summer" (12 chapters), "autumn and winter in Europe and Africa" (six chapters), and "synthesis" (two chapters). Allan J. Baker's chapter on molecular genetics of *Calidris* (including Willet for comparison) and a paper by N.C. Davidson and R.I.G. Morrison on time budgets of pre-breeding Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones and Sanderlings on Ellesmere Island are the only contributions not based solely on Red Knots, although much of the conservation synthesis applies to other shorebirds and wetland birds generally.

Earl Godfrey's chapter on subspecies of Red Knot in the extreme northwestern Canadian Arctic, the chapter by R.I.G. Morrison and B.A. Harrington on the migration system of *Calidris canutus rufa* in the "New World," the aforementioned time budget study on Ellesmere Island, and Hugh Boyd's chapter on the influence of Canadian Arctic summer conditions on numbers wintering in Great Britain are the only chapters based primarily on western hemisphere data. However, the finding that many of the birds staging and wintering in Europe breed in northern Canada makes the European studies that dominate the book of direct relevance to North America. Indeed, the Canadian Wildlife Service's R.I.G. Morrison authored or co-authored chapters based on Canadian, Latin American and Icelandic studies. Moreover, until we know more about migration and wintering areas of birds breeding in Alaska and the western Canadian Arctic, we won't know how much of the data on Asian and Australian-wintering and migrant birds applies to North American populations.

Nearly every chapter is based on banding, often in combination with color marking. Banding has obviously been the key to sorting out migration and wintering areas of various breeding populations of the five races recognized in the book. It has also been important in determining turn-over rates (and therefore total numbers) of birds staging or wintering at specific sites, fidelity to such sites (and lack thereof), and time budgets. Also of direct interest to banders is the inclusion in several chapters of molt and morphometric data.

Most of the errors in this book are of the typographical/proof-reading sort. Several cited papers are missing from the reference sections of their chapters, especially in chapters authored or co-authored by the editors(!). Most of these missing references can be guessed at, however, from the references in other chapters. The title is slightly misleading in that the Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) is not covered, not even in Baker's review of the genetics of *Calidris*, except in a suggestion by the editors that it requires considerable research. The editors err in chastising North Americans for applying the term "Red Knot" to the least red of the subspecies, a name generally applied by North Americans (including in this book) to the species as a whole. The criticism seems better applied to the Latin name (*C.c.rufa*) of that race. Reference

to knots among "waterfowl" is also inappropriate in a book intended for a world-wide audience because of the North American usage of "waterfowl" for Anatidae only. "Water bird" would avoid confusion.

On the whole, this book provides an excellent synthesis of what *is* and what *is not* yet known about Red Knot migration and how that knowledge can and cannot yet be used in conservation of wetlands. It should stimulate considerable new research into filling the gaps that remain.

Martin K. McNicholl

Sonoran Desert Spring. John Alcock. 1985, reprinted 1994. Univ. Arizona Press, Tucson, AZ. 134 pp. $15.95. Paperback.

John Alcock has produced a series of volumes that describe life in the Sonoran Desert and the animals that live there. Each of these volumes presents fascinating descriptions of the behavior of desert birds, insects or other critters, as well as an explanation of how researchers design experiments to explain why desert organisms do what they do. **Sonoran Desert Spring** was the first of these volumes to be published. It originally came out as a hardcover book in 1985, but was not reviewed in *NABB*. Since subsequent volumes in the series have been reviewed (e.g., **Sonoran Desert Summer,** *NABB* 15:90, 1990), it seems appropriate to use the publication of a paperback edition of **Spring** to consider Alcock's initial effort.

The book is organized as a series of short essays, each grouped into sections related to the spring months. The behavior and ecology of great purple hairstreak butterflies, White-throated Swifts, Gambel's Quail, collared peccaries and other desert species are described and their evolutionary significance explored. As described in the previous review of **Summer**, Alcock has an easy writing style and brings many abstract concepts in evolutionary ecology to an understandable level. Reading his essays is a great way to learn how ecologists do science.

There is less about birds in **Spring** than there was in **Summer**. Insects take center stage in many of the essays in **Spring**. Another difference between the volumes is that Alcock takes a more environmentalist tone in **Sonoran Desert Spring**. Many impacts of thoughtless humans on the desert and its organisms are described and lamented. One can see from the writing that Alcock is none too pleased with how weekend visitors have trashed his favorite hiking places.

There is little in either **Sonoran Desert Spring** or **Summer** about bird banding, but there is a great deal in each volume about the ecology of desert animals and plants. The essays brought back welcome memories to me (a former desert dweller) as I read this book, white sitting in the stifling humidity of a summer in South Carolina.

John B. Dunning, Jr.