

## News and Notes

This new section, 'News and Notes', is intended to provide a forum for up to date information on threatened species, on-going conservation work and other issues related to bird conservation. It will include pieces abstracted from other publications. Please send any contributions to BCI News and Notes Editor, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, or e-mail them to Rob.Williams@birdlife.org.uk.

### **Status of the Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi* since the start of a volcanic eruption in July 1995**

The Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi* is endemic to the Caribbean island of Montserrat. In July 1995, a long dormant volcano in the south of the island became active and the resulting eruptions and pyroclastic flows (avalanches of super-heated ash, rocks and air) have devastated approximately two-thirds of the oriole's forest habitat. The remaining forest in the Centre Hills area of the island has been extensively ashed.

In 1997, a partnership was formed between Montserrat's Ministry of Agriculture, Trade and Environment (MATE), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust (JWPT), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-UK) and the International Institute of Tropical Forestry in Puerto Rico (IITF) to assess the conservation status of the oriole since the start of the eruption and determine whether a captive-breeding programme was required.

In December 1997, representatives from RSPB, MATE and IITF undertook a survey of the birds in the Centre Hills, an area of 1,500 ha. The survey estimated that several thousand individual orioles remained on the island. The forests in the south that surround the volcano have been devastated and probably contain few, if any, orioles.

Although the population of orioles was larger than anticipated, volcanic activity and extensive ashing might have affected the oriole's breeding success. To investigate whether or not this was the case, 15–20 pairs of orioles were followed through-

out the breeding season, from April–August 1998. This work, which was funded by RSPB, MATE and the American Bird Conservancy, will increase our knowledge of the breeding ecology of the oriole and help show whether or not the Centre Hills population has suffered reduced breeding success as a consequence of heavy ashing and acid deposition.

Although still in progress at the time of writing, initial results from the breeding season have shown that there has not been widespread breeding failure during 1998 as had been feared, although chick survival and hence overall breeding success is low. However, we will not know whether the number of chicks being produced is sufficient to maintain the population of orioles at its current level until the end of the breeding season.

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### **Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* records in 1998**

After an absence of three years, a Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* has again been recorded at Merja Zerga in Morocco, although the record awaits verification by the Moroccan Rare Birds Committee. A single adult bird was seen on 11 February 1998. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s Merja Zerga was a regular wintering site for the species, whose global population has been estimated at 50–270 individuals. Wintering and passage birds have also been recorded in Greece. So far this year three individuals

have been seen at Lake Ismaris, around 20 April, and possibly the same three birds were seen on 16 April at Porto Lagos. A further report of two birds at Porto Lagos on 6 April awaits verification. The only other record for 1998 is of a single bird in Northumberland, England (record awaiting acceptance by national rarities committee). If accepted this will be the first record for UK.

Efforts to locate the breeding grounds, thought to be south-western Siberia, continue with ground surveys by Russian ornithologists. An expedition from the University of Glasgow will visit Kazakhstan later this year to look for post-breeding and passage birds. BirdLife International maintains a database of all records of Slender-billed Curlew.

Please send records to BirdLife International, European Division, Wellbrook Court, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0NA, England.

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### **Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* / White-headed Duck hybrid recorded in Turkey**

Hybridisation and competition from the introduced Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* have been identified as the main threats to the European population of the White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*. The latter has declined in western Europe where the Ruddy Duck has spread rapidly following its introduction to the United Kingdom in the 1950s. Until recently Ruddy Ducks were absent from the eastern range of White-headed Duck in Europe. However, on 4 June 1998 a hybrid Ruddy Duck/White-headed Duck was seen on Uyuz Lake, in the central Anatolian Steppe of Turkey. This record, coupled with one of a Ruddy Duck from Turkey in 1988, suggest that the Ruddy Duck may soon be able to establish in Turkey, which holds Europe's largest wintering population of White-headed Duck, with at least 11,000 birds. If Ruddy Ducks become established in Turkey, they

would threaten the world's largest breeding population of White-headed Duck in Russia and Kazakhstan. Urgent measures are clearly needed across Europe to control the spread of the Ruddy Duck.

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### **Whooping Crane *Grus americana* numbers up**

By the end of 1997, the wintering population of Whooping Cranes *Grus americana* at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas had risen to 171, including 29 juvenile birds. This is an increase of 11 on the previous year.

*Grus Americana*, the newsletter of the Whooping Crane Conservation Association.

### **Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni*/ Argentina: Monocrotophos global withdrawal**

After the deliberate killing of over 62,000 birds (mostly doves) with monocrotophos on one 60 hectare farm in Argentina last summer, there have been nine incidents reported of over 500 dead Swainson's Hawks *Buteo swainsoni* in Cordoba province, outside the core area of ABC's agreement with Novartis. Monocrotophos was involved in some of these kills.

ABC (in conjunction with AOP – BirdLife partner in Argentina) has been working with Novartis on the Swainson's Hawk and the problems with monocrotophos and other bird killing chemicals. ABC has long advocated that monocrotophos be removed from the market globally because of its acute toxicity to birds.

Novartis, the world's largest pesticide manufacturer, announced that they were phasing out all manufacture and sales of monocrotophos globally. Monocrotophos accounts for 8% of all insecticide sales of Novartis but many other companies also manufacture it. Actions must be pursued to have it withdrawn globally. Novartis

also announced the phasing out of five other organophosphate insecticides – phosphamidon, formothion, dichlorvos, disulfoton and isazofos. Phosphamidon and disulfoton have been documented as bird killers in the US, among 40 such pesticides. ABC has learned that Argentina plans to eliminate the use of monocrotophos in Argentina entirely.

ABC is planning to hire a full time pesticide specialist to work on its Campaign on Pesticides and Birds. A conference sponsored by the Rachel Carson Council is scheduled for 25–26 September near Washington, DC on Pesticides and Birds. Gerald Winegrad continues to work with Novartis and has initiated meetings with the Global Crop Protection Foundation to promote safer use of pesticides. ABC has been involved in meetings at the State Department on the Prior Informed Consent Convention that have led to a strengthening of this international agreement to restrict trade in problem chemicals.

Gerald Winegrad, American Bird Conservancy  
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### **New flock of Madagascar Teal *Anas bernieri* found**

A flock of 67 of the endangered Madagascar Teal *Anas bernieri* has been found near Tambohorano in western Madagascar. The birds were found during surveys of Project Zicoma, the Important Bird Area programme for Madagascar.

Lincoln Fishpool, BirdLife International

### **Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques* numbers up**

The 1996–97 breeding season was the most productive of recent years with the wild population reaching its highest level since 1972. There are now 76–87 birds in the wild and 23 in the captive population. Of the 21 chicks hatched, only three fledged naturally, the others being taken

into captivity. Three of these birds have since been released into the wild and appear to be doing well, moving up to 1 km from the release site within three months.

*Oryx* 32, 95–96.

### **Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone corvina* recolonisation of Marianne Island**

After an absence of over 60 years the Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone corvina* has been found to once again be present on Marianne island. Three birds, two females and a male were found on a survey covering approximately one fifth of the 95 ha island in May 1998. The species became extinct on the island in 1936 following clearance of native forest for a Coconut *Cocos nucifera* plantation; four other endemic bird species also became extinct. The visit found that secondary forest of native Takamaka *Calophyllum inophyllum* is regenerating on the steep northern slopes, while introduced species such as Kalis Diapap *Tabebuia pallida* are dominating the remainder of the island; the mature coconut trees are dying and there is little coconut regeration through the dense understorey. Further surveys are required to discover whether these birds are part of a small population or overspill from the stronghold on neighbouring La Digue Island.

The Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher is critically threatened with a known population of about 60 pairs on La Digue. There were also records in the 1970s from Praslin and Félicité, though the status of the species on these islands is currently unknown. A priority for the species is the establishment of a second viable population and the Marianne observations raise hopes that this may be possible and that the species may be able to tolerate regenerating woodland in old plantations.

Parr, S. (1998) Recolonisation of Marianne Island by Seychelles Paradise-Flycatcher after 60 years. Africa Round-up. Bull. African Bird Club 5 (2), 90.

### Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* survey results

A survey of the critically threatened Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* in January 1998 found 613 birds, the highest count ever for the species. Attempts to capture and fit satellite transmitters have also been successful with thirteen birds captured at Mai Po, Hong Kong and four birds captured at Tsangwen Estuary, Taiwan; all birds have been fitted with colour rings and six, three from each site, have been fitted with satellite transmitters.

Dahmer, T. and Felley, M. (1998) Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) Census, January 1998. Unpublished report. Hong Kong: Ecosystems Ltd.

### Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* breeding range extension

An expedition to the Malkachan river delta, Magadan, District, Siberian Far East, Russia, during the summer of 1997 recorded the first breeding of the endangered Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* on the north-western coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. This suggests that a breeding distribution along the entire coast of the Sea of Okhotsk is possible, in turn indicating that the population may be higher than the previously estimated 1,000 individuals.

Doer, D. (1998) Zur Bestimmung und Verbreitung des Tüpfelgrünschenkels *Tringa guttifer*. *Limicola* 12: 57-71.

### Syria joins Ramsar convention

Ratification of the Ramsar treaty by Syria was received by UNESCO on 5 March 1998, with Lac de Sebkha al-Djabbul being designated as its first Ramsar site. Syria becomes the 107th contracting party to the convention; Luxembourg and Belize have also since ratified the treaty.

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### Army education to help threatened eagles

Dr Omar Al-Saghier (BirdLife Representative in Yemen) has started a conservation awareness programme for military personnel in Yemen. Visits have been made to army camps on the main migration flyways for birds of prey where the soldiers are informed of the threats facing birds of prey and their help is enlisted in protecting them. The initiative is a direct result of BirdLife Action Plans prepared for the threatened Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* and Imperial Eagle *A. heliaca*, both of which occur in Yemen on migration and in winter.

Richard Porter, BirdLife International

### Marek's disease on the Galápagos Islands

During late 1995 and early 1996 there was an outbreak of Marek's Disease (an avian plague) amongst chickens on Isla San Cristóbal. In October 1996 the disease was also detected on Isla Santa Cruz, where approximately 800 chickens died. No wild birds are known to have caught the disease though some finches and four Smooth-billed Ani *Crotophaga ani*, an introduced species, died of unknown causes in an infected area. The analysis of two dead chickens confirmed the presence of the disease and several other avian diseases, *Salmonella pollorum* and *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, and parasites, ascarids and eggs of *Heterakis* (pinworms).

The Charles Darwin Research Station has undertaken an investigation of potential impacts of the disease and found that Medium Ground-finch *Geospiza fortis* and Small-billed Ground-finch *Geospiza fuliginosa* are most at risk as they often feed in association with chickens. Quarantine measures were introduced and implemented. Unfortunately, politics prevented the destruction of the largest flock of infected chickens.

Several other avian diseases have also been reported in Galápagos including *Sal-*

*monella pollorum*, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, Newcastle's, Gumburo (infectious bursal disease), Infectious bronchitis, *Trichomonas gallinae* and avian pox. Of these *T. gallinae* has been reported in Galápagos Doves *Zenida galapagoensis* and avian pox in several native birds, most notably the Mockingbirds *Nesomimus* and Finches *Geospizinae*.

Hernan Vargas and Heidi M. Snell (1997) *The arrival of Marek's Disease to Galápagos. Noticias de Galápagos* 58: 4-5.

### Further sites for Ankober Serin *Serinus ankoberensis* found

Recent surveys in Ethiopia, as part of the national Important Bird Areas project, have found Ankober Serin *Serinus ankoberensis* to have a larger distribution than previously thought. Additional surveys are planned to further establish the range and status of this little known Ethiopian endemic.

Wondafrash, M. (1997) *The Status and Range extension of Ankober Serin Serinus ankoberensis. EWNHS Newsletter Oct-Dec 1997*, 5-6.

### BOOKS

Gancz, A. (ed) (1997) *Important Bird Areas in Israel The Torgos* 27. Tel Aviv, Israel: Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (BirdLife Partner Designate).

The winter 1997 issue of the journal *The Torgos* (no. 27) is dedicated to the publication in Hebrew of a manuscript based on Evans (1994). The majority of the text is a Hebrew translation of relevant sections of that book, including the introduction and

chapter on Israel. Additional material has also been included for a number of sites, with English translations of this new information also being given.

Evans, M.I. (ed) (1994) *Important Bird Areas in the Middle East. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.*

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Nolan, V., Ketterson, E.D., Thompson, C.F. (1997) *Current Ornithology*, vol. 14. New York: Plenum Press. 303 pp, \$89.50

The latest offering in this series, which reviews current understanding of subjects within the scope of avian biology. This issue contains chapters on; physiological, ecological and evolutionary bases for the avoidance of chemical irritants by birds; temporal flexibility in avian reproduction: patterns and mechanisms; sexual selection and the evolution of song repertoires; social dominance in birds: early findings and new horizons; energy management in passerine birds during the non-breeding season: a review; motor correlates of vocal diversity in songbirds. The contents of this book are up to date and thorough in their treatment of the subjects; though the subject matter is likely to make it of limited interest to most conservationists and birders.

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### Also received:

Moynihan, M.H. (1998) *The Social Regulation of Competition and Aggression in Animals. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. 158 pp, £19.95*