

BOOK REVIEW

Atlas des oiseaux de France en hiver.

D. Yeatman-Berthelot. 1991. (Société Ornithologique de France: Paris).

575 pp., numerous maps and line drawings; 260 × 195 mm. Price not known.

This is a splendidly produced volume dealing with the distribution of birds in winter in France based on surveys done in the period 1977–1981. The coverage achieved and the detail obtained is most impressive. It follows the now customary format of the better atlas publications. Standards of compilation in faunal distribution surveys of this type were established by works like the original British Trust for Ornithology 'Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland' (Sharrock 1976). Quality of design and publication achieved by the BTO Atlas was in no small part due to the great care taken by their publishers, T. & A. D. Poyser. The French atlas unquestionably maintains these high standards and has been most beautifully designed and printed. It should appeal to any bird watcher with an interest in good books and in particular anyone with a special interest in the distribution of birds across the western part of the Palaearctic region.

Like the follow-up atlas produced by the BTO after a survey of the winter distribution of birds in Britain and Ireland (Lack 1986) this French compilation follows an earlier inventory of the breeding season distribution of birds in France (Yeatman 1976).

This book opens with a description of the methods used in the collection of the distribution data and the treatments used on these data for production of the maps. There are discussions on the climate of France in winter; detailing specially the period of the survey. There is a general description of the geography of France which helps in understanding the distribution patterns revealed for some species. It is interesting to note that of the 1 000 or so grid cells used in this atlas, half (504) had between 61 and 80 species listed, another 221 had winter scores of 90 to 120 species and 65 had more than 120 species. The greatest number was one grid with 164 species. Only 59 grids had between eight and 40 species.

The bulk of the book (490 pages) is devoted to double-page spreads for each species. The main map, on one page, shows winter occurrence plotted according to a national 20 × 27 km grid pattern. The green symbols denoting winter occurrence within each of the grid cells are plotted on a plain outline map of France and the island of Corsica. To assist with orientation within the boundaries, the 95 'departements' (numbered alphabetically) of the administrative regions of the country are shown and there is an attached transparent overlay of the grid pattern. Occasionally distribution in different years of the survey is shown on smaller accompanying maps to emphasize variation. However, for breeding birds this space is usually reserved to show breeding distribution during the period 1974–1975, obtained from the earlier French Atlas. The text accompanying each set of maps is concise and to the point and is full of useful information concerning distribution and population status in France. Each text is embellished with a small line drawing which elegantly depicts the species in a winter setting. The texts have been prepared by many different authors, often by those with special interest in the particular species. Altogether 302 species are discussed as winter birds in France. Of this number there are 246 that regularly occur in winter (54 as regular winter migrants to the area). The remaining 56 species occur occasionally in winter. The occasional winter visitors are briefly mentioned at the

conclusion of the book, mostly without the need of a map. There is a list of the organizations responsible for the project and a list of the names of all the observers who participated. There is an index to French and to scientific names, and an expanded table of contents at the back of the book.

The Blackbird, *Turdus merula* (Merle noir) proved to be the most widespread species in winter in France; so it was as a breeding bird. It was closely followed by the Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs* (Pinson des arbres); the Robin, *Erithacus rubecula* (Rouge-gorge familier); the Great Tit, *Parus major* (Mésange charbonnière) and the Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes* (Troglodyte mignon). Among the 45 most widespread species in winter in France only the Brambling, *Fringilla montifringilla* (Pinson du Nord) and Redwing, *Turdus iliacus* (Grive mauvis) do not breed in France. It is interesting to note that 31 of the most widespread breeding species in France are among the 45 species most widespread in winter in that country.

Some interesting features revealed by this atlas include the fact that the Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo* (Grand Cormoran) is only known to breed along the Channel coastline of northern France and in one area in Corsica but is widespread throughout France in winter. Likewise the Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (Tadorne de Belon) breeds along the Channel and the Atlantic coast, mainly in Bretagne, and to a lesser extent on the Mediterranean shores but is more widely dispersed in winter. There has been a spectacular increase in the number of Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus ruber* (Flamant rose) wintering in France in the period since 1965, with up to 23 000 present in 1982. There is only one breeding area for this species in the Camargue. Attempts have been made to depict relative numbers for two pigeons, the Stock Dove *Columba oenas* (Pigeon colombin) and Woodpigeon, *C. palumbus* (Pigeon ramier) and for the Rook, *Corvus frugilegus* (Corbeau freux). The widespread distribution in France of the Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* (Pic cendré), the Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus major* (Pic noir) and the Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius* (Pic mar) is interesting to note when compared with their absence from the nearby British Isles. There are several other such examples where distribution and abundance differ markedly between France and nearby Britain and Ireland, especially the winter distributions. Comparisons between this work and the British Atlases, previously mentioned, are very instructive. Insertion of critical seasonal isotherms have been made on the maps for the Partridge *Perdix perdix* (Perdrix grise), the Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* (Bécasse des bois) and the Fan-tailed Warbler *Cisticola juncidis* (Cisticole des joncs) suggesting reasons for limits to distribution in winter.

This book is so well laid out that even without a good command of the French language it is relatively easy to delve with profit into the carefully presented information. I can highly recommend it if you are at all interested in birds of this region of Europe.

References

- Lack, P., 1986. The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland. (T. & A. D. Poyser: Calton.)
 Sharrock, J. T. R., 1976. The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland. (T. & A. D. Poyser: Berkhamsted.)
 Yeatman, L., 1976. Atlas des oiseaux nicheurs de France de 1970 à 1975. (Société Ornithologique de France: Paris.)

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